



**BRAND ENGAGEMENT ON FACEBOOK:
AN ANALYSIS OF UKZN PIETERMARITZBURG STUDENT HABITS**

By:

‘Mathabo Castalea Duma

211550402

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Supervisor:

Dr. Sandra Pitcher

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DECLARATION

I, Mathabo Castalea Duma, declare that

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ABSTRACT

Facebook is a type of social media platform that is used by millions of people around the world to engage in peer-to-peer conversations. Brands also use this platform to share their interests, thoughts and opinions with their consumers. Mostly, this is due to the high increase of social networking sites globally, so brands are now turning away from traditional forms communication to new types of integrated marketing communication. Additionally, studies have shown that the youth are heavy users of the Internet and online social networking sites however, little data exists on the use of the Internet and online social networks, including Facebook, in the global South. The main objective of this study is to explore how the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal's students use Facebook to interact with brands. In particular, the study explores the perceptions on brand engagement on Facebook, the ways in which Facebook helps facilitate sharing and the types of brands students choose to share with their network. An explanatory sequential design was adopted as a mixed method technique to understand the interplay between branding concepts and social media. Findings revealed that students use Facebook to engage with brands however, results show that there is a shift from using Facebook to using other platforms such as Instagram, concluding that students preferred to engage with brands with Facebook in combination with other platforms.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Facebook is one of the popular platforms which inspires people to engage with brands and share their interests, thoughts and opinions with others (Bushelow, 2012). Therefore, the amount of time spent on Facebook by individuals has grown drastically in recent times (Ivala & Gachago, 2012) and with this high increase, brands are now turning to social networking sites to increase their interaction with their customers (Bushelow, 2012). Thus, the focus of this research is to identify how students at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus interact with brands on Facebook.

Additionally, the aim of this dissertation is to find out what are the most popular brands students interact with on Facebook, why they choose to communicate with these brands and to evaluate the impact these brands have on their self-perceived behaviour as consumers.

Additionally, the main research question is: How do University of Kwa-Zulu Natal's students use Facebook to interact with brands? And thus, the list of objectives this study is aiming to answer are: which brands do students engage with most on Facebook; what features draw students to interact with brands on Facebook; how networks like Facebook, help facilitate sharing; and what types of brands do students choose to share with their network? And why?

According to Bosch (2009) research on how the youth use the Internet and online social networking sites has, until this point, been mainly located in the US and Europe.

Thus, very 1

little data exists on the use of the Internet and online social networks, including Facebook, in the global South (Bosch, 2009). Conceptually, this research expands on existing research around the areas of social media and branding. Social media can help individuals to engage in peer-to-peer conversations, and share their opinions and experiences with their networks. And therefore, according to Grobler (2014) the importance of social media platforms is to help marketers see the frequency at which content is viewed on their online platforms, though they will not have control on the content consumers produce. In this regard, this above argument will help prove in my study whether Facebook, as a most used platform, will have an impact on students' consumer behaviour and their self-perceived behaviour on popular brands. However, for the process of brand engagement to occur on Facebook, building a strong and successful brand is essential (Vukasovič, 2013) in order for companies to be more appealing and striking to its customers.

In addition, with my results, the reaction of University students can help marketers determine the students' behaviour towards a brand, and also those marketers can be able to find a gap on where they can improve. And what can assist these marketers is the online reviews on brand pages determined by the electronic word-of-mouth, as this form of communication helps spread information about a brand to a wide range of audience. Further, it attempts to provide an investigative account of using Facebook as a main social media platform for interacting with brands on one University campus, while offering key marketers for future research. In addition, this present study provides key insights into University students' use of online social networking, which may be convenient to use within South African contexts.

Furthermore, this study serves to broaden academic understanding of the way in which people engage with brands on Facebook and thus, my focus is narrowed to students from the UKZN

Pietermaritzburg campus. To help answer key questions of my research, it is important to consider conceptual frameworks such as the idea of distributed networks and to expand on two concepts pertaining to networks: the network society and computer networks. Therefore, to better understand these concepts, this research will focus specifically on the works of Castells (2004) and Wellman (1999). Wellman (1999) looks at ‘community question’, in other words, how people are living in a paradigm shift – a shift which happens when people move away from old explanations of reality to the emergence of “new way of thinking, valuing and viewing and perceiving the world” (Rosado, 1997: 1), in other words, living in ‘small societies’ to living in ‘networked societies’. On the other hand, Castells (2004) looks at how networks function, thus, it is important to engage with Castells’ (2004) *The Network Society* because it gives useful ways on understanding how societies can be understood as networked societies, rather than individuals.

In addition to this, I will explore the impact that social media has on brand engagement, with uses and gratification as a theory to assist in finding out “why” people shifted from the use of traditional media into new media. To assist with this, case studies on Facebook will be explored to explain how, users [customers] – belonging to a brand community – interact with brands. By highlighting the work of authors, such as Dunne and Lawlor (2010) who present us with an understanding of social networking; Dunn (2010) and Tarvainen (2013) who provide us with an understanding of the term branding, and Bushelow (2012) and Gangadharbatla (2008) who explore how marketers use social networking sites to engage their brands with their customers on their brand pages, this dissertation will help outline what motivates users to engage with particular brands.

Essentially, this study is an ethnographic study and aims to analyze how students at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (Pietermaritzburg campus) engage with brands. Additionally, this study is best suited to a mixed methods approach in order to measure and analyse the study of people and the casual relationships between their variables (Brennan, 2013) and lastly, to understand the motivation behind interacting with brands through ‘liking’ and/or ‘following’ a brand page on Facebook. To collect this data, questionnaires and three focus groups were used. Additionally, the area that the study was conducted was the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus and within it was the three Colleges, namely Law and Commerce, Agriculture, Science and Engineering and Humanities.

Moreover, chapter 1 has dealt with introducing this dissertation. Therefore, the next chapter will engage with the literature dealing with topics on distributed networks, social media and branding. Chapter 3 will cover and describe research philosophies, the choice of methods to be used for my analysis, the methodological tools suitable for my study, and its limitations. While chapter 4 highlights research design best suited for my study, quantitative and qualitative research. Chapter 5 illustrates my research findings from the analysis chapter. Whereas the final chapter determines the research’s conclusion, limitations and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

In order to answer my primary research question – how University of Kwa-Zulu Natal's Pietermaritzburg students use Facebook to interact with brands – a number of key theoretical issues need to be explored. Firstly, the main conceptual framework that best suits my research is the idea of distributed networks; also, three concepts pertaining to networks such as, the network society, and computer networks, will be expanded on. In addition to this, I will also explore the impact social media has had on brand engagement, with uses and gratification as a theory to assist in finding out “why” people shifted from the use of traditional media into new media.

Moreover, the research will focus specifically on the works of Castells (2004) and Wellman (1999). Wellman (1999) looks at ‘community question’, in other words, how people are living in a paradigm shift. This shift happens when people move away from old explanations which cannot explain reality well and resulted in redefining boundaries that were not acceptable due to the emergence of “new way of thinking, valuing and viewing and perceiving the world” (Rosado, 1997: 1); and Castells (2004) looks at how networks function. Thus, I feel it is necessary to engage with Castells’ (2004) *The Network Society* because it provides a useful set of guidelines on understanding how societies can be understood as networked societies, rather than individuals or traditional communities. Additionally, authors such as van Dijk (2006) and Cardoso (2006) also contributed to Castells’ (2004) theory of networks.

Moreover, I will also be looking at Facebook case studies to explain how, as the most used

social networking site, users [customers] – belonging to a brand community – are able to interact with popular brands. By highlighting on the works of authors, such as Dunne and Lawlor (2010) who present us with an understanding of social networking; and Dunn (2010) and Tarvainen (2013) who provide us with an understanding of the term branding. Branding can be seen as a company's brand identity – the term brand identity will further be explored later in the branding section. Further, Bushelow (2012) and Gangadharbatla (2008) closely look at how marketers use social networking sites to engage their brands with customers on brand pages; and finally, identify what motivates those users to engage with those particular brands.

2.2 Networks

2.2.1 What is a Network?

Siapera (2012) says that the theory of networks has, for a long time, been explored by scholars such as Wellman (1999) and Castells (2004). Siapera (2012) also claims that these scholars' aim was to consider the sociality of networks and the “developments [that] led to new momentum in this area” (Siapera, 2012: 201). In addition, it is important to learn how networks were first developed, and Milroy's (1980) early studies explain his discovery on networks, in other words, the early phase of networks. Then later learn how networks evolved into a phenomenon of today's online social networks.

Milroy (1980: 40) began studying networks in the early 80's and concluded that a social network is simply defined it as “a structure comprised of individuals connected with others as friendship”. Therefore, given in a simple form, a network can be seen as a set of nodes in which each node is considered as an individual and this individual can then be interconnected to other nodes through ties. To illustrate this argument, it is useful to picture that a group of friends are

a network and each friend is a *node*, connected through *ties* (relationships) to other friends and those friends' friends. Additionally, *flows* are the content of a tie such as the content shared between friends (nodes) and relationships (ties). On the one hand, looking at Monge and Contractor's (2003: 39) argument, they state that "communication networks are the patterns of contact that are created by flows of messages among communicators through time and space". This means that if each friend, as a node, is connected to at least one other friend through ties, and "both independently and through one another, the regular contacts between these friends, each in speech or other activities, were mediated by a technology, and therefore, ties are what connects them" in terms of gossip, love and support (Barney, 2004: 26). Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) argued that networks are rhizomic in structure because they spread horizontally in different directions. For example, if one person is connected to different friends in one system or network, such as a social media platform, this means that they are in a rhizomic structure. However, if one friend disconnects with that person, his or her friendship with other friends will not be affected. So, what makes this friendship rhizomic is that that person can make new friends without affecting the entire system. Hence, Smite (2012) posited that a rhizomic structure is comparable to Internet hypertexts because the Internet has no beginning or end and texts are interconnected (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988). In addition, the concept of a rhizomatic network is grounded on "principles of connection and heterogeneity; meaning that any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988: 7). Furthermore, "nodes increase their importance for the network by absorbing more relevant information, and processing it more efficiently" through ties, (Barney, 2004: 26) which are the ways in which those nodes are connected. Guerin (2013: 138-139) adds on to say that a network can connect every node to other nodes in different directions having no beginning or ending to it, "forcing us to notice the dynamism of the movement between nodes, between ideas".

As described, in Wellman's (1988: 21) earlier work, he defined a network "as a set of ties linking social system members [nodes] across social categories and bounded groups". Castells (2000: 469) explained that "as a historical trend, dominant functions and processes are increasingly organized around networks". Therefore, he argued that:

"A network is seen as a structure comprised of different, but interconnected points – this structure has come to replace both the individual and the nation-state as the primary form of social organization" (2000: 469). This was because a network has no center but nodes, and these nodes – as a "location for intersecting connections" (Smite, 2012: 16) – allowed for people to communicate with other people from other parts of the world. There is no hierarchy or particular pattern in a network (Castells, 2000).

Furthermore, Castells (2000) posits that we, as society, have entered a new era which is facilitated by new electronic technologies, in which space is a space of flows and time is timeless. Firstly, what space of flows means is that society is created around flows, in other words, there is flows of organizational interaction, flows of information, flows of technology, and flows of images, symbols and sound (Castells, 2010). Therefore, Castells (2009: 34) adds that a great number of leading functions in the network society, such as "financial markets, media networks, networked forms of global governance, and global social movements, are organized around the space of flows". Space of flows entails nodes and networks; in other words, it involves "places connected by electronically powered communication networks through which flows of information that ensure the time-sharing of practices processed in such a space circulate and interact" (Castells, 2009: 34). For example, people can interact with others from different places at a chosen time using electronically powered communication networks, such as social media platforms. Consequently, time can be defined as the sequencing of practices, whereby there is biological time – characterized by the existence of humans (Castells,

2004). And in the network society, the relationship to time refers to the way people “use information and communication technologies in a relentless effort to thrash time by negating sequencing” (Castells, 2004: 57).

Moreover, networks have become the most resourceful organizational forms in society and therefore, the three major features of networks – flexibility, scalability, and survivability – have benefitted from the new technological environment (Castells, 2004). Firstly, *flexibility* networks can “reconfigure according to changing environments, and while in the process keep their goals while changing their components” (Castells, 2004: 23). They are able to block points of communication channels in order to find new connections. Secondly, *scalability* allows networks to enlarge or shrink in size if there is a little interruption (Castells, 2004). Lastly, *survivability* points to networks wide range of configurations that allow them to resist attacks to their nodes and codes. This is because “the codes of the network are contained in multiple nodes that can reproduce the instructions and find new ways to perform” (Castells, 2004: 23).

To further this argument, the work of Wellman (1999) is used. Wellman’s (1999) understanding of ‘community question’ does not aim to find out if communities exist, it is to find out how social systems can be combined together; in other words, what types of relations do people have with each other, how do they manage their life with people and what insinuations this may have for society in a broader way. Additionally, Wellman (1999: 648) considered how community can be created through technology, and he explains that “we, as people, are living in a paradigm shift, not only in the way we perceive society as a whole, but even more in the way in which people and institutions are connected”. It is the shift from living in ‘small societies’ to living in ‘networked societies’. Although people often view society in terms of

groups, it is more useful to argue that today they function as networks. Furthermore, Wellman (1999: 648) posits that even before the introduction of computer-mediated communication, it became evident that when “communities were defined as sets of informal ties of sociability, support, and identity, they were rarely neighbourhood solidarities or even densely knit groups of kin and friends”. This happened because communities were plainly networks [interconnected], and not organized neatly into ‘little neighbourhood boxes’.

Furthermore, by redefining communities as networks, Wellman (1999: 648) holds that communities can now be understood as “networks of interpersonal ties that provides sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging and social identity”. This could not happen before the evolution of networks because people belonged in particular groups such as at home, in the neighbourhood, at work, in other words, they were members of little-boxed societies (Wellman, 1999). Thus, each of these groups has an “internal organization that is often hierarchically structured”: at work, there will be supervisors and employees; at home, it is parents and children and lastly in the neighbourhood, there are union executive and its members (Wellman, 1999: 648). Further, in such a society, any interaction that takes place remains in its place: one group at a time (Wellman, 1999). However, this is different in a networked society due to the interconnection. Boundaries are more “permeable, interactions occur with diverse others, linkages switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies (when they exist) are flatter and more recursive” (Wellman, 1999: 648). It appears as if there is no one in control. It is argued that it is therefore, easier to make friends outside your physical neighbourhood than within it (through ties) because network communities such as social networks, allow for that as one can create an online profile which then allows for vast interaction with different people around the world (Smite, 2012).

2.2.2 The Network Society

Castells (2004: 14) argues that the “new social structure has its own origin, which depends on spatiotemporal context”. However, it is easier to analyse social structure disregarding the processes that led to its formation (Castells, 2004: 14). The growth of the internet and home computing has given more light to the nature of community, and how “computer-mediated communication affects social relationships” in a networked community (Castells, 2004: 217). Critics argue that in an information society in which “work, leisure, and social ties are maintained online, people could reject the need for social relationships completely based on physical location” (Castells, 2004: 217). Whereas idealists argue that the Internet can offer a replacement for traditional public spaces because of the creation of new forms of online communities (Castells, 2004). Furthermore, it is argued that community can either be lost or completely recreated online, and yet what this debate fails to see is that community “has long been freed from geography and that the Internet may hold as much promise for reconnecting people to communities of place as it does for liberating people from them” (Castells, 2004: 217). Networks do not have fixed limits because they are “open-ended and thus, their expansion or contraction depends on the compatibility or competition between the interests and values programmed into each network which come into contact within their expansionary movement” (Castells, 2009: 19).

Moreover, through the growth of the Internet, we see that networks can represent an important pattern of life because, as argued by Capra (2009: 9), “a network is a pattern that is common to all life. Wherever we see life, we see networks”. Referring back to Wellman (1999), he mentioned that through ties, people can easily make friends within network communities, such as social networks, then within physical communities. This happens because network communities are interconnected: a friend’s friend will be your mutual friend. Additionally, it is

also easier to interact with other people online than offline and therefore, information distributed amongst friends can be accessed and spread much easier online than offline. Monge and Contractor (2003: 17-23) argue that social network analysts have, for a while, explored the dynamic of social networks at the “heart of social interaction and the production of meaning, leading to the formulation of a systematic theory of communication networks”. Communication with other people can help form perceptions of reality and relationships, and these become the foundation of community (Castells, 2004). Through interaction, the acceptance and rejection of others’ messages is influenced by the perception of the relationship that people have with one another (Castells, 2004). Therefore, social interaction lives at the heart of who we are and what we do. Consequently, it is impossible to separate social practices from social interactions (Castells, 2004).

From these arguments, the phrase ‘network society’ emerged (Barney, 2004: 25). This concept is based on two key ideas. Firstly, network society emerged because networked communication and information distribution created interconnectedness among users which depended on these users to mediate a number of increasing social practices (Barney, 2004). The second characteristic of network societies is the “reproduction and institutionalization throughout (and between) those societies of networks as the basic form of human organization and relationship across a wide range of social configuration and involvement” (Barney, 2004: 25-26). In the past, there was a common structure of creating relationships within ‘little-boxed’ societies, but through the establishment of a network society, information is reproduced and more relationships are built through ties (Barney, 2004). Furthermore, Castells (1998: 370) suggests that “the network society [...] is made up of networks of production, power and experience, which hypothesizes a culture of virtuality in the global flows that transcend time and space”. This means that information can be exchanged without worrying about time or space. Thus,

space of flows determines a prospect in which interactions among society can occur in different times, in chosen time and at a distance (Castells, 2009). Castells (2009) also argues that places connected by communication networks run electronically, through flows which information moves and thus, ensures time-sharing practices is processed and then circulated between different societies. This shows the impact networks have on society and how they transcend time and space. Research suggests that these networks overlap with other important networks that are “made up of specific configurations of global, national, and local networks in a multidimensional space of social interaction for construction of social practice” (Castells, 2009: 19)

In Castells’ (2009: 24) latest work, he declares that the social structures of humans are arranged organizationally in relationships of production, consumption, reproduction, experience, and power indicated in relevant communication implied by culture. Within network communities, information can be produced (nodes), and through interaction, it is simpler for users to consume information and then reproduce it as their own content. In producing content, users have the power to change communication coded by [pop] culture to make it their own. Using social media platforms, such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, for example, users can recreate content, such as the news, to make it their own. And therefore, these platforms enable them to spread to other users much quicker than on physical communities.

van Dijk (2006) on the other hand, says the concept of the network society is more concerned with the form and organization of processing and exchanging information. He declares that the network society is a “social formation with an infrastructure of social and media networks enabling its prime mode of organization at all different levels, being individual, group/organizational and societal levels” (van Dijk, 2006: 20). Gradually, social and media networks

link all parts of individual, group and societal together (van Dijk, 2006). People have moved from being individuals communicating with others from their neighbourhood, to a structural society, communicating within institutions, such as religion to being in a networked society, interacting with different people globally through social networks (Wellman, 1999).

Furthermore, networks are a “mode of organization of complex systems in nature and society” (van Dijk, 2006: 24). However, when looking at the system in its simplest form of nature and society, it is clear that a system may be organized hierarchically which characterizes the relation of elements. For instance, the connection between elements of atoms, molecules and chemical substances have a fixed order however, matter gets complicated when it becomes life because elements are organized in a more complex way (van Dijk, 2006). So, the way life is organized while energy is exchanged with an environment, has to adapt to that particular environment in order to survive. To further elaborate on this notion, van Dijk (2006) provides six types of network and therefore, networks can occur both in complex matter and in living systems on all these levels. Firstly, the *physical networks* which entail natural systems, such as the ecosystems and river networks, of higher complexity (van Dijk, 2006). The ecosystem has a way of interconnecting elements which are formed by the interaction of different parts of the earth surfaces. For example, a community of living organisms in combination with the non-living mechanisms (air, water, and soil) on earth working or interacting as a system. And river network that organizes water flowing downward in different branches becoming accustomed to the ground (van Dijk, 2006).

In a living system, when the organisms become larger, they create [network] systems being nervous system and blood circulation, which form part of an *organic networks* (van Dijk, 2006). It is argued that the most significant cell is the DNA string of genes (van Dijk, 2006).

Therefore, van Dijk (2006: 25) posits that the “largest nervous system of organisms is found in the human brain”; and thus, the human mind functions well with *neuronal networks* that are arranged in a higher level in the mental ‘maps’ in specific parts of the brain. Furthermore, Edelman and Tononi (2000) argue that the connection between these ‘maps’ may be evident when the human’s consciousness emerges due to the network formed in the mind.

The forth level of networks is the *social networks*. These are social systems with actual ties (relationships) in abstract relationships (van Dijk, 2006). In this network, according to van Dijk (2006), the communicative interaction is created by the social agents, such as individuals, groups, organizations and societies at large and the links between them. Therefore, this is seen in a social [network] system when people make or create relationships with others online platforms.

Humans have also created a couple of *technical networks* such as roads, distribution networks and the telecommunication and lastly, computer networks (van Dijk, 2006). These networks together are packed with symbols and information which connect human senders and receivers through media [network] systems (van Dijk, 2006).

Furthermore, van Dijk (2006: 25) discusses the importance of the relationships between social, technical and media networks because they shape the infrastructure of the network society. Consequently, he distinguishes four social levels found in the network society. He says that the first level is the level of *individual relations*. This level correlates with the idea of [social] networking because individuals create ties (relationships) with family, friends, neighbours, and colleagues on online platforms (van Dijk, 2006). He believes that this level is “supported by

the rise of the media networks of the Internet”, by communicating through emails, mobile devices or telephones (van Dijk, 2006: 25). The second level is *group and organizational relations*. This happens when individuals are able to create different kinds of groupings of agencies such as loose relationships found on online mailing lists, or strong relationships found within corporations. This shows a transaction from social [network] communicative (inter)action into technical networks. Thus, these groupings fall under telecommunications and computer networks as most organizations become network organizations that operate with independent teams and created projects (van Dijk, 2006). However, they “assemble to form network organizations that cooperate to implement a particular task” (van Dijk, 2006: 26). The third level is the level of *societal relations* where individuals, groups and/ or organizations are able to shape a society that is constructed and connected through social and media networks (van Dijk, 2006: 26). For instance, it may happen that companies can promote and communicate their brands to their ‘followers’ on social media channels, such as Facebook, in order to build strong relationships through brand loyalty. This can also be done by linking social networks with telecommunication networks, such as attaching a Facebook icon to send out mass emails customers, and that will easily direct them to a brand page, for example (van Dijk, 2006: 26). Finally, the last level is the *global relations* level. In this level, societies have entered the global web era where organizations have expanded into international relations (van Dijk, 2006: 26). And thus, in order to be recognized and communicate with audiences globally, organizations would have to use international broadcasting, telecommunication and computer networking (van Dijk, 2006: 26).

The network society is considered a global society because the infrastructure of a social structure is based on digital networks which has the potential capacity to “reconfigure themselves, as directed by their programmers transcending institutional boundaries through

telecommunicated computer networks” (Castells, 2009: 24). With that being said however, does not mean that people worldwide are involved in these networks (Castells, 2004). Actually, most people are not. But society may be “affected by the processes that take place in the global networks of this dominant social structure” even if they are not connected (Castells, 2004: 33). This is because the core activities that shape and control the everyday lives of human beings around the world, are organized around global networks (Castells, 2004).

2.2.3 Computer Networks as Social Networks

The Internet has helped shift the world toward a networked world and further improved the turn toward networks and away from groups (Wellman & Hampton, 1999: 649), in other words, it offers people an escape from traditional public sphere to being individuals (Castells, 2004). Therefore, through the Internet, people can create a profile of who they want to be online, not only for interaction, but also to connect with other people and acquire new information (Wellman & Hampton, 1999). Looking at traditional public sphere, it is a term coined by Jurgen Habermas where people do not behave neither like business or professional people conducting their private affairs, nor do they behave like members of a constitutional order focusing on issues of legal constraints of a state bureaucracy (Habermas et al., 1974). But it is a place where people can come free of the social restrictions put on them by politics and economics and thus, talk about issues of social relevance (public issues) (Castells, 2004). Hampton (2003) adds on to say that the invention of the Internet has reduced the friction of space, in other words, the time and cost necessary to communicate due to distances between people. Wellman and Hampton (1999: 649) argue that when computer networks connect people and organizations, they then become the “infrastructure of social networks”. Just like telephones, computer networks enhance the ability to connect, and help people “form and maintain ties over long and short distances” (Wellman & Hampton, 1999: 649). However, it is not that people were not

connected globally before, but now more messages and information are received faster as they go over computer networks, although there is a rapid convergence between old and new telecommunication networks (Wellman & Hampton, 1999).

However, critics fear that computer-mediated ties are “inauthentic or less meaningful and thus, make two misguided assumptions” (Wellman & Hampton, 1999: 651). Firstly, they assume that ties exist only online rather than being a combination of people meeting online and/ or in-person (Wellman & Hampton, 1999). Secondly, they also assume that the Internet is driving people away from deeply meaningful household and neighbourhood conversations, whereas it is more likely driving people away from “loneliness”, sitting by themselves in front of the television watching sitcoms (Wellman & Hampton, 1999: 651). On the other hand, idealists acknowledge the possibility of life in several global networks however, critics state that “they have not recognized that computer networks can enhance local relations in homes, workplaces, and neighbourhoods” (Wellman & Hampton, 1999: 651). In actual fact, computer networks assist in forming and strengthening local relationships, for example, it is suggested that many email messages are spatially local, usually organizing around local situations (Wellman & Hampton, 1999: 651).

Furthermore, computer scientists and developers have come to the realisation that when computer systems connect people and organisations, they are integrally social because computer networks mainly support social networks (Wellman, 2001). A group or a community is only one specific type of a social network; one that could not be “easily bounded” (Wellman, 2001: 2031). Additionally, Wellman (2001) argues that in networked societies, “boundaries are more permeable, interactions are with diverse others, linkages switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies are flatter and more recursive” (Wellman, 2001: 2031). Hence, many

people and organisations communicate with others in ways that subdivide group boundaries; rather than relating to a specific group, they “cycle through interactions with a variety of others, at work or in the community” (Wellman, 2001: 2031). Furthermore, Wellman (2001: 2031) says that most of time, computer networks and social networks are joined together, whereby computer networks link people to social networks and thus people bring their offline situations to “bear when they use computer networks to interact”. Thus, users’ computer-mediated communication has become part of their everyday lives, rather than being a separate set of relationships (Wellman, 2001).

2.3 Uses and Gratification Theory

2.3.1 What is Uses and Gratification?

Quan-Haase and Young (2010) argue that the origin of this uses and gratification was developed to explore the use of traditional media such as television and newspapers however, recent studies have also applied this framework to new media and the Internet. Wimmer and Dominick (1994) suggest that the concept of uses and gratification started in the 1940s whereby researchers aimed to find out why audiences engaged with the media. Therefore, this theoretical framework is effective when examining questions such as: “how” and “why” individuals use media to satisfy particular needs (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010: 351).

Traditionally, researchers tended to highlight the effects of audiences being exposed to media (Dunne & Lawlor, 2010: 47) however, uses and gratification supports the idea that one should consider what people do with the media rather than the impact the media has on individuals (Katz et al., 1974). Quan-Haase and Young (2010: 351) argue that the “audience [are] actively choosing and using media in response to specific needs [and] the foundations for examining gratifications obtained from the media are put in place”. For example, if an audience member

feels the need to escape, there are specific media available to gratify this need in a satisfying manner (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

With the increase of new media adoption, “important new research from the uses and gratification perspective is emerging” (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010: 351). This research has highlighted what prompts individuals to switch from traditional media to new media and what kinds of gratifications these switches are providing (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). One of the main reasons for this, is the interactivity provided by new media. This is where users have an ability to provide content in response to a source (Ha & James, 1998). However, to further elaborate on the term, Ko et al. (2005: 59) have argued that interactivity on the Internet enables active consumers to participate in the “persuasion process by controlling the advertising messages, amount of information, and order of presentation at any time, according to their needs and preferences”. They also add that the Internet brings about much better tools to reinforce relationships with customers no matter the distance. In other words, consumers may interact with a company no matter their physical locations (Ko et al., 2005).

Moreover, in new media, there is a blur between what it means to be a consumer and a producer. This has led to the introduction of the term *prosumer* – created by a futurist Alvin Toffler in 1980. Prosumer describes users’ ability to take control over the content that is being produced and distributed on the Internet (Toffler, 1980). This means that consumers can be allowed to participate in the process of selecting, designing and distributing content on the Internet (Ritzer et al., 2012). Additionally, Lin (2001: 23) explains that “this provides audience members control over content and its use, making it important to examine the gratifications new media provides to users in comparison to traditional media”. Hence consumers can be asked to gradually provide ideas for certain advertisements, and some of those ideas are adopted by

advertisers to make necessary improvements (Ritzer et al., 2012: 383). In addition, these scholars also argue that this process of consumers providing ideas play a major role in producing shared meanings that make up a brand; consumers do not easily accept brand messages created by marketers and advertisers, but prefer to provide ideas that those advertisers then use (Ritzer et al., 2012: 383). Moreover, “the concurrent use of various tools, such as social media channels, suggests that each fulfils a distinct need making an analysis of [uses and gratifications] essential” (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010: 352).

2.3.2 Traditional Marketing

Organisations see marketing as an important “business function that plays a critical role in their effort to gain a competitive advantage in the market place” (Du Plooy, 2012: 23). Because the marketing environment changes daily, for marketers to succeed, they need to have a balance between knowledge and creativity (Grobler, 2014). Thus, Lamb and Boshoff (2007: 55) have defined the term marketing as “the processes of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals”. This definition is focused on the concept of exchange, whereby organisations exchange goods and services based on what customers need, desire and want (Kotler, 2003). According to Du Plooy (2012), it is suggested that these parties (organisations and customers) involved need to have something of value to offer the other, and must have the desire and ability to find a way to communicate with one another. Therefore, due to the evolution of technology, the marketing discipline is no longer limited only to consumers, as consumers now have the ability to access information and purchase products or services at any given time. In that case, consumers can decide on what “constitutes value and what relationships are more important, needed and wanted, and not marketers” (Luck & Moffatt, 2009: 314).

Moreover, Du Plooy (2012) notes that it is through customer experience and customer satisfaction which drives the process of marketing. Customers need to have an experience with a company first before expressing their satisfaction with their goods or services. This process is shaped by “a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organisation, which results in a reaction” (Du Plooy, 2012: 25). Additionally, the marketing-exchange process should lead to customer satisfaction, because when one has satisfied customers, the marketing concept has been implemented successfully (Du Plooy, 2012: 24-25).

a) Traditional Marketing Mix

The practice of traditional marketing is explained best by the marketing mix model (Wahid & Tariq, 2011). The marketing mix model is best known as the “4P’s” of marketing: product, price, place and promotion (Wahid & Tariq, 2011). Du Plooy (2012: 25) argues that the marketing mix was developed to satisfy customers’ needs “of selected profitable target market(s)”. Therefore, to enable this process of exchange and also, build an effective relationship with customers, marketers needed to observe the needs and the wants of their customers. In other words, these marketers needed to “develop a product or service that [satisfies] customer needs, by offering it at a certain price, make it available through a particular place or channel of distribution and lastly, develop a program of promotion or communication to create awareness and interest” (Du Plooy, 2012: 26).

i. Product

This is the first element in the marketing mix. According to Kotler (2003), a product is a solution to what customers need, want and desires. As a result, that enables companies to know particular functions (such as benefits, status, quality and reputation) customers are expecting in their products or services (Kotler, 2003). Additionally, companies should first have an idea

as to what kind of product or service they want to produce before deciding on a promotion campaign; or setting a price for that product or service (Lamb & Boshoff, 2007). In this stage, brand building is very important however, not to spot the product, but for it to “contribute to the symbolic value or features associated with the total market offering” (Du Plooy, 2012: 27).

ii. Price

Price can easily be lowered or raised than other elements, which makes it more flexible (Lamb & Boshoff, 2007). The price strategy is determined by other various strategies such as “marketing objectives, positioning and communication objectives, product cost and demand, and the perception of the target market” (Kotler, 2003: 391). Additionally, Belch and Belch (2012: 61) argue that the product price should stay constant with firstly, a customer’s perception of the brand quality; and to also support the brand image of the product and the company. Furthermore, when companies make decisions on their pricing, they first need to be sure that those decisions are aligned with goals their company wants to achieve (Kotler, 2003).

iii. Place

This element of marketing mix is about how companies make a product or service available for customers’ wants and needs, at a particular place and time (Lamb & Boshoff, 2007). In other words, place means location of a product (Kotler, 2003). For example, in stores or factories, as well as manufacturers’ process of distributing products to the market (Bearden et al., 2007).

iv. Promotion

This marketing mix element can also be called marketing communication. Marketing communication happens when marketers inform and persuade current and potential customers

of a product or service to change their opinion or decisions on that particular product or service (Lamb & Boshoff, 2007). Promotion therefore, aims to communicate its message to its targeted market through channels such as *advertising* (television, radio, magazine and printed newspaper) – a paid form of “persuasive communication that uses mass media to reach broad audiences in order to connect an identified sponsor with their target audience(s) (Moriarty et al., 2012:7); *public relations* (Grobler (2014: 36) describes this marketing communication element as an element that assesses the public’s attitudes, then “identifies areas within the company that the public may be interested in, and executes a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance”. PR can facilitate communication between a company and its customers, shareholders, suppliers and employees (Grobler, 2014: 36); *direct mail* this form element uses different channels such as face-to-face interviews, mailing, telephone, brochures and the Internet, to reach prospective customers and also to create leads to sales (Lamb & Boshoff, 2007). These channels enable companies to create a personal feeling with customers and thus, build a long-term relationship with them (Kotler, 2003); *personal selling* this type of marketing mix happens on a face-to-face basis, whereby a seller attempts to find what potential buyers would want in a product or brand, and thus seek out to satisfy those by presenting goods, services or ideas (Du Plessis et al., 2010: 6). Further, this face-to-face interaction can allow for customers’ immediate response and/ or feedback on their questions and requests (Du Plooy, 2012: 41); and lastly, *sales promotion* (free samples, competitions, and premiums) – this type of marketing communication “influences the purchasing behaviour of consumers by accelerating purchasing or consumption, thereby providing them with an incentive to react quickly to the promotional offer” (Du Plooy, 2012: 39).

However, critics of this model highlighted that these four elements were company-oriented, and for a company to succeed in the market, it should be customer-oriented (Duncan, 2005). In

other words, companies should focus on their customers' needs and wants first before getting into the company itself (Duncan, 2005: 14). This process led to the creation of an integrated marketing strategy, which is discussed in detail in the next section.

b) Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC)

As previously mentioned, the purpose of marketing communication is to “inform, persuade or remind the selected target audience of the market offering” (Lamb et al., 2003: 329). This is because the initial role of this type of communication is to influence the target market's behaviour, and not only to persuade or inform consumers.

In order to achieve this technique, known as the marketing communication mix, it is essential for marketers use it to communicate with current customers as well as potential audiences (Du Plooy, 2012). As aforementioned, these techniques include, advertising, public relations, publicity, personal selling and sales promotion. However, it is imperative that these techniques are to be supplemented newly developed techniques such as electronic marketing, social media, viral marketing and branded entertainment, and online media, to reach a wider range of audience online. In addition, Du Plooy (2012: 43) argues that “new marketing communication elements and online media have changed the interface between consumers and organisations, where there has been a shift in power between the media and the consumer, with consumer-generated media turning consumers into content creators”. Thus, consumers may now claim greater control as to what, when, where and how they are subjected to “corporate communications, and therefore blend the traditional boundaries between public and private, producers and consumers” (Du Plooy, 2012: 43).

Moreover, transitions in power relations have not only changed brand experiences and what

customers expect from the brands, but has also changed the decisions they make when purchasing brands. Research shows that these new forms of marketing communication should be “combined and integrated together in a marketing campaign, to contribute to a consistent and synergised brand message” (Du Plooy, 2012: 46). This is known as integrated marketing communication (IMC).

The idea of IMC is to combine marketing communication functions in an integrated way. Thus, this term can be defined as “a marketing communication [plan] that recognises the added value of the strategic roles from a variety of communication disciplines (for example, advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations), and then combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact” (Du Plooy, 2012: 47-48). This highlights that the added value of integrating different marketing techniques, and online media such as social media, virtual marketing, electronic marketing, can have impact on a marketer’s ability to carry out a consistent message to audiences (Du Plooy, 2012).

Furthermore, when coordinating the traditional promotional mix with new forms of online promotion, such as social media, marketers can see the frequency at which content is viewed on their online platforms, though they will not have control on the content consumers produce (Grobler, 2014).

Moreover, it is important for marketers to consider a replacement of the 4P’s with Lauterborn’s (1990) 4C’s: consumer, convenience, cost, and communication. Gordon (2011) argues that this model is consumer-oriented and therefore, looking firstly at *consumer*, which replaces product as the focus is on customers’ needs by seeking feedback and market testing of a brand product as opposed to releasing a product to consumers. Secondly, *convenience* replaced place, and

therefore, marketers need to consider the availability of information about products or services and how convenient consumers can purchase products or services and/ or receive them after purchase. Thirdly, pricing is replaced by *cost* and so, it is important to determine how flexible one's prices have to be when selling products or services to targeted customers because the higher prices are, the more customers move to other products; as a result, a company may run a loss. Finally, *communication*, which replaced promotion. It is ideal for marketers to promote their brand products using traditional media channels, however, in that regard it is more essential to communicate with consumers to discover how and where to improve on products or services. Therefore, according to Grobler (2014) it is important for marketers to integrate a new form of online promotion, social media, for easier and better interaction with consumers because information can reach a large number of audience at once and that may increase an opportunity for branding and repeat business.

2.3.3 Social Media

Interactive technologies are challenging traditional broadcast media monologues – which is a one-to-many form of communication – into social media dialogues (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). Furthermore, this definition suggests that content is not passively consumed by audiences but instead it is produced, shared and consumed by users actively generating content (Laroche et al., 2012: 77). Strengel (2009: 62) adds that social media is a group of collective tools and online spaces available to assist individuals and businesses to speed up their information and communication needs online. It helps these individuals to engage in peer-to-peer conversations, and share their opinion and experiences with their networks.

Furthermore, if one considers social media as a branding and marketing tool, it offers a much faster and more cost-effective way to reach highly targeted audiences than marketing through

one-way communication media, such as websites, newspapers and television (Weber, 2009). Weber (2009: 26) thus argue that it can also be seen as “an opportunity for the research and development department to get immediate feedback on the product, and make corrections and then move to the next challenge”, and this includes “customers in the product development companies that can create bonds that foster long-term brand loyalty” (Weber, 2009: 26).

This form of media has therefore, significantly changed the tools and strategies of communication between organisations and customers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Traditional forms of communication (one-way communication) expected organisations to produce content and information for their customers, who were seen as passive audiences and received information without comment. Social media however, enabled better access to content and information by incorporating integrated marketing communication (IMC) tools and strategies. Singh, Veron-Jackson and Cullinane (2008) pointed out that the creation of new media has offered marketers tools such as integration of new advertising tools, social media websites, which enable them to better target their customers, while at the same time has made customers more powerful by providing them with tools that help them take control of how they are targeted. Social media platforms have allowed consumers an ability to interact with other consumers and thus, create their own content. According to Constantinides and Fountain (2009), power structures have changed because consumers now have more access to information which was previously not available to them, and therefore, consumers’ attitudes have changed, leading to new consumer needs, values and buying behaviour. In addition, Hearn, Foth and Grey (2009: 49) acknowledge that the “participatory culture, enabled by recent technological innovations, shifts the communication flows away from a central business-to-consumer model. The development is more towards consumer-to-consumer flows of communication as consumers start to create content on their own by using new media

applications and services”. Mangold and Faulds (2009) further argue that social media includes a variety of online, word-of-mouth forums, including blogs, consumer-to-consumer e-mail, creativity works sharing sites, such as Youtube, and social networking sites, like Facebook. Additionally, these examples of social media have become a huge factor in influencing several aspects of consumer behaviour including awareness, getting information, opinions, attitudes, purchase behaviour, and post-purchase communication and evaluation (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). For example, consumers are able to interact with other consumers on these platforms and thus, with comments about an organisation posted on their pages regarding the organisation’s products, those consumers can have an impact on other consumers’ decision-making. Hence, social media can be seen as a new hybrid element of the promotion mix for an organisation. In addition, what then makes social media a new hybrid element is because consumers have turned away from traditional forms of communication methods such as television, newspapers, and radio to new forms of communication such as social media channels. This new form of communication allows for organisations to communicate with consumers, consumers to easily communicate with organisations and other consumers on the same platform. And therefore, information can easily be spread and gained through electronic word-of-mouth, as it can reach a large number of people at once.

Because social media forms part of the promotional mix, it pools together different kinds of traditional integrated marketing communication (IMC) tools with a “highly magnified form of word-of-mouth whereby marketing managers cannot control the content and frequency of such information” (Mangold & Faulds, 2009: 359). It is important for organisations to incorporate social media in their IMC strategies and promotional efforts because social media does not only enable companies to talk to their customers, it also enables customers to talk to one another (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Additionally, social media enables these customers to talk to

companies; however, this “role is market research-related rather than promotion-related” (Mangold & Faulds, 2009: 358-359). Market research is important to the 4C’s because it allows marketers to communicate to the target market and to see the needs and wants of the customers. Consequently, the ability of consumers to communicate with one another limits the amount of control companies may have over the content and spreading of information (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Vollmer and Precourt (2008: 5) note that with social media, “consumers are in control; they have greater access to information and greater command over media consumption than ever before”. This has then led marketing managers to incorporate social media into their IMC strategies.

2.3.4 From traditional WOM to electronic WOM

Early studies on online communities have tried to explain why organisations may be interested in social platforms. Kozinets (2002) suggests two reasons, word of mouth and market research. Cvijikj (2012: 36-37) argues that traditional (offline) word-of-mouth (WOM) is usually done through person-to-person communication between two people. Early research such as Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955, in Cvijikj, 2012: 37) claim that WOM communication was “found to be a powerful tool for marketing which influence[d] consumer’s attitudes towards existing products and [led] to adoption of new products”. This is because WOM messages come from close friends or family directly and are “perceived as more objective and credible as compared to marketing messages communicated by the companies” (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955, in Cvijikj, 2012: 37).

As such, Buttle (1998) states that individuals frequently use WOM to provide information about a related brand or product; thus, WOM plays an important role in purchase decision making (Richins and Root-Shaffer, 1988). However, regardless of the recognized value of

WOM communication, companies often underused WOM marketing as part of their marketing campaigns, because of the common belief and concern that WOM communication cannot be controlled and that positive WOM could only be achieved through positive product experiences (Gremler et al. 2001: 41). The concept of trust also explains why online users prefer other customers' opinions on a brand product and therefore, Mangold and Faulds (2009) are sure that this form of communication allows for customers to talk to one another and thus, is more valuable however, other writers such as Kozinets (2002), highlight how internet-based media which has facilitated the development of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), is proving to be of even more value to marketers than ever before.

Like traditional word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth exercises considerable influence on consumer buying and communication behaviour however, it also has the ability to reach a larger group of people than ever before. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can be seen as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual and former customers about a brand, which is made available to [a] multitude of people via the Internet" (Svensson, 2011: 3). Facebook is a social media platform that is ideal for spreading eWOM because it allows for a combination of WOM and one of eWOM's benefit which is "reaching a larger audience while still maintaining trustworthiness of one's social circle" (Svensson, 2011: 3). Some writers argue that eWOM should be used interchangeably with the term viral marketing (Cvijikj, 2012: 40) which can be seen as shared information about a brand product spread to consumers over existing social network platforms (Cvijikj, 2012).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) have developed this idea further by proposing that viral marketing is a "form of eWOM where marketing messages related to a company, brand, or product are transmitted in an exponentially growing way, through the use of social media platforms"

(Cvijikj, 2012: 40). However, Kirby and Marsden (2006) believe that there is a difference between viral marketing and eWOM. These researchers argue that viral marketing refers to marketing “campaigns whose goal is a creation of persuasive messages which are designed to be spread online, while eWOM marketing undertakes action with a goal of stimulating the consumers to talk positively about the company, a product or a service” (Kirby & Marsden, 2006: 167). Furthermore, eWOM is more effective and beneficial today, because its aim is to stimulate an ongoing conversation among consumers. Consequently, word-of-mouth communication and viral marketing are at the core of new marketing activities, such as social media marketing, carried out by companies on social media platforms. Social media also provides new opportunities such as brand exposure benefits for companies, and Park et al. (2011) argue that with online review (a factor of eWOM), consumers can interact with other consumers to gather product information and consumption-related advice. Through online review, marketing researchers can get closer to consumers because they can gather information about what consumers prefer, desire and need from a brand (Kozinets, 2002), thus creating brand communities.

2.4 Branding

Branding deals mostly with the notion of identity of a company (Dunn, 2010: 10). When a company creates its identity, it usually builds an image for its brand(s), which stimulates the way customers view or perceive it (Totterman, 2012: 11). Dunn (2010) argues that branding can be seen as a way to differentiate one product from all other products, even if all products appear similar. A brand thus, consists of different components, “from a name, logo and colour scheme to a particular ‘feel’ or ‘look’, to intrinsic values such as morals and values” (Dunn, 2010: 10). In other words, it reflects a complete experience that a customer has with a product or service (Tarvainen, 2013: 15).

Lake (2012) claims that a good brand conveys a clear message and emotionally connect to the organization's viewpoint while confirming a user's credibility while creating loyalty through brand community. Brands are created in such a way that they are differentiated from competition (Tarvainen, 2013). In other words, brand image (which is the customer's views on a brand) and brand identity are the two elements that help differentiate brands from their competitors (Totterman, 2012). Therefore, "a brand is the set of experiences and images created in the mind of a customer, which the company can try to influence, but not define or determine for the customer" (Totterman, 2012: 11). Consequently, it is customers who create and build a brand, and not sellers (Gronroos, 2010). "The seller can create the right circumstances for the desired brand to develop, but it is through a brand formation process that the brand emerges for the customer" (Totterman, 2012: 11). For example, it is through customer's experience and ideas of a brand that that brand is created, in other words, customers have a point of view of how a brand should be through impulses, images, sets of association of a brand, how they observe the brand and their reaction (Totterman, 2012). For brands to succeed, Barwise and Meehan (2010) suggest that a brand should share four qualities: a) they should offer and communicate a clear and relevant customer promise; b) build trust by delivering on that made promise; c) drive the market by improving on the promise continually; and d) seek further advantage by innovating beyond what is familiar.

Brands are maintained through customer-based brand equity (Tarvainen, 2013), which is a process that occurs when a consumer is aware of a brand and thus, holds a unique and/ or strong brand relations in their memory (Keller, 1993). Furthermore, Aaker (1996) has a model on the concept of customer-based brand equity, and suggests four dimensions, such as brand awareness; brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty.

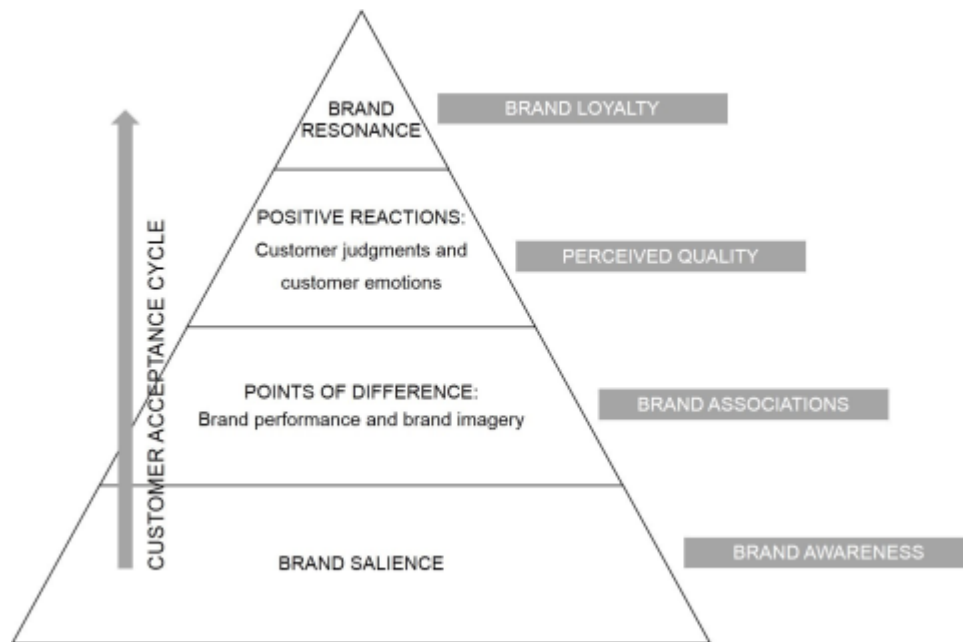


Figure 1: *Customer-based brand equity model*

According to Aaker (1996: 8-9), these dimensions “serve as a set of assets required for building brand equity and each asset creates value in different ways”. Therefore, what this *Figure* shows is that in order to get customer acceptance in terms of branding, customers have to go through each of these periods. In addition, as per Keller (1993) and Aaker’s (1996) explanation of the model, each asset is defined below:

Firstly, using *Figure 1* as point of reference, *brand awareness* happens when a brand reappears in a consumer’s mind. In other words, awareness is measured in terms of how consumers remember a brand, going from brand recognition (being familiar with a brand from past exposure) to brand recall (Aaker, 1996). Brand awareness can be seen as brand salience, as shown in *Figure 1*, which is a process of how often and easily a consumer can recognise and think of a brand based on how they continuously purchase products or services (Keller, 2009). A lot of times, companies join and create social media profiles in order to create awareness (Thackeray et al., 2009). Furthermore, Keller (2009: 143) claims that it is through interactive

marketing communications which increases awareness for products and services purchasing, and the primary advantage is “the ability to reach customers when they seek information through search engines”.

Secondly, in order to build strong brands, one needs to develop and implement brand identity. As suggested by Aaker (1996: 25), identity-based perspective is guided by *brand associations* in considering the “brand perception of stakeholders”, in other words, how stakeholders are able to understand and observe a brand; and “self-reflection of the brand by internal stakeholders”, in other words, how the brand looks, the visual narrative. Using *Figure 1* as point of reference, Keller (2009) posits that consumers’ brand associations is divided into two: brand performance and brand imagery. Firstly, brand performance emphasises on “how well the product or service meets the customers’ functional needs” (Keller, 2009: 143). While brand imagery expresses “brands’ attempts to meet customers’ psychological or social needs” (Keller, 2009: 143).

Thirdly, *perceived quality* – this is a “major strategic thrust of a company, the key positioning dimension and the defining point of differentiation for corporate brands” (Tarvainen, 2013: 21). It is essential to understand what quality is to different customer segments before understanding what a ‘perceived quality’ is. Therefore, looking firstly at quality, it is the level of excellence in which something is seen thus, customers can have a good or poor-quality perception toward a brand (Tarvainen, 2013). Referring to *Figure 1*, customer perception thus, can be divided into two parts based on their focus: brand judgements, which is based on customers’ own opinions and therefore, their evaluations are based on brand performance and brand imagery. And into brand emotions which are focused on “customers’ emotional responses and reactions with respect to a brand” (Tarvainen, 2013: 22). In addition, perceived quality can be differentiated

from the actual quality by how customers may have previously been influenced by images and poor quality of brands (Tarvainen, 2013). Furthermore, with the rapid growth of user-generated online content, research has shown that consumers are more involved with user-generated content related to brands that customers will be ‘following’ at the time, which positively affects their perceptions towards brands as brands directly will be communicating with them and thus, that allows them to effectively evaluate customers’ reaction (Tarvainen, 2013: 23). Consequently, based on the findings of customers’ perceptions on brands, “companies can utilize user-generated content to build brand equity through an interactive strategy to improve brand positioning according to consumer’s wants and needs” (Tarvainen, 2013: 23). Further, the notion of online marketing tools is used to acquire consumers’ positive reactions (Tarvainen, 2013). In other words, these interactive platforms can assist in decision making and attitude formation when brands study consumers’ responses and/ or reactions toward their brands thus, that can help in market research (Keller, 2009).

Lastly, *brand loyalty* is the final stage of customer acceptance cycle. Brand loyalty is a degree of commitment companies have achieved between its customer base and beyond, in other words, how consumers continuously purchase the brands’ products and services (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2008). Loyal customers can generate probable sales increase and profit streams because of buying the same products and services from brands and also by enhancing consumers’ relationship with a brand by loyalty programs such as customer clubs (Tarvainen, 2013). As shown in *Figure 1*, when consumers are loyal to brands, it is when consumers have brand resonance, in other words, they are at a stage of accepting brands and continuously using them. Furthermore, through loyalty programs, which can be managed online, majority of companies engage their consumers through platforms such as Facebook; therefore, by using the “like” button, brands are able to see users’ affinity thus, by “liking” a brand page, customers

can “express their interest to that particular brand, and communicate positive associations about a brand to others, to stay in contact with the brand” (Lipsman et al., 2012: 43).

2.4.1 Brand Communities

Brand interaction on networking sites between community members is greatly influenced by the relationship customers have with, and the attitude they have towards, a brand (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Social networking sites have changed consumers from silent and isolated individuals, into interactive, flexible and more uncontrollable due to the rapid growth and use of these channels therefore, brands are unable to control content consumers may have produced (Patterson, 2012). This is mainly affected by online word-of-mouth amongst customers. As per Woisetschläger, Hartleb, and Blut (2008), virtual environment users usually get together in subgroups with a specific brand at its centre. Then these consumers “share their interests for a brand, exchange information and knowledge, or simply express their affection for this specific brand”, and this can be referred to as a brand-related community (Zaglia, 2012: 216). Moreover, Zaglia (2012: 217) argues that brand communities¹ are communities of consumption; they differ from traditional communities due to their “commercial character, and members’ common interest in and enthusiasm or love for a brand”.

In addition, Kozinet (1999) argues that brand fans can share their feelings and enthusiasm about a brand on fan pages and thus, be joined together by their shared interest in a brand. Research has shown that in order to establish a successful brand community, it depends on how active community members are on social network fan pages (Woisetschläger, Hartleb, & Blut, 2008:

¹ “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001: 412)

241). These fan pages enable consumers to share information about the brand and the product however, social media customers have control over the content and information produced by brands (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Furthermore, brand fan pages reflect customer to customer relationships while also widening the brand to customers (Muñiz & O'Guinn 2001). They also provide a source of information and social benefits to members about the brand and its products (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004). On these brand fan pages, companies can create brand posts containing stories therefore, referring back to *Figure 1* as point of reference in building brand acceptance or brand recognition; on Facebook pages, people are able to recognize or be aware of brands as their pages will continuously be appearing on their feeds. However, it is important to note that these people may have before been aware of such brands via television, newspapers or magazines. Secondly, brand imagery/ photos or videos may enable brands to interact with consumers and then be linked to what consumers will be exposed to; thus, consumers can then interact with these brand posts by “liking” or commenting on them (de Vries et al., 2012) which leads to brand resonance, where customers are loyal to the brand. As a result, when consumers are satisfied with a brand, they can spread information via electronic word-of-mouth regarding the brand or the product as eWOM allows for information to reach a large number of audience at once (Cvijikj, 2012).

2.4.2 Engagement and Interaction on Social Media Platforms

Social interaction ties add on the value of trust people have in brand communities (Lin & Lu, 2011). In other words, “increasing interaction on social media between fans develops relationships among them and between them and the brand, which in turn adds value to the brand fan pages” (Bushelow, 2012: 7). It has been argued that Facebook, as one of the popular

social media platforms, inspires individuals to share information about themselves, their interests, and exchange thoughts and opinions with others thus, marketers can use it as a tool for branding (Bushelow, 2012).

Research argues that university students, “who were the original users of Facebook, developed an online culture, and brands need to be aware of [this] when using the site for advertising” (Bushelow, 2012: 7) because users can have a huge influence on each other to change opinions on the content produced. Arguably, Facebook is an appropriate platform for increasing awareness for different brands, and create in-depth conversations between the brand and its publics (Bushelow, 2012: 7). However, Cvijikj (2012) suggests that it is important that companies establish a brand presence on Facebook by building and promoting brand pages. These should be used further to deepen the relationship with the consumers by engaging and connecting with Facebook fans through social and interactive strategies. Moreover, Vorvoreanu (2009) posits that Facebook users want to communicate with brands however, on their own terms; hence it is a wise idea that brands do not use an ‘in-your-face’ marketing strategy to help lure more customers.

a) Brand Engagement on Social Media

For brand engagement to occur on Facebook, building a strong and successful brand is essential (Vukasovič, 2013). Vukasovič (2013: 99) claims that the “brand building process starts with the development of a strong value proposition”, a service that intends to make a company striking to its customers. As soon as this step is established, the marketer needs to get customers to try out the brand. Thereafter, if a brand is well developed, it should provide a satisfactory experience and lead to a willingness to buy the product it represents (Vukasovič, 2013). Furthermore, Vukasovič (2013: 99) argues that in order to lure “product trial and repeat

purchase requires triggering tools, which are created through online advertising, promotion, selling, public relations, and direct marketing” by displaying a company’s brand product on social media channels for ‘followers’ to initiate purchasing decisions. Thus, brand engagement is built by combining communications and satisfactory, usage and experience, brand awareness, confidence and brand equity (Vukasovič, 2013).

Moreover, Tarvainen (2013: 7) argues that “modern society is becoming more and more communicative and the markets are saturated thus, companies need to take extra measures in order to differentiate themselves and to make their message memorable”. Moreover, consumers want products that provide unique experiences that appeal to their emotions, of which this determined by creating relationships with brands online (Tarvainen, 2013). In the past, a strong research stream in relation to brand relationships emerged and therefore, highlighted features and dynamics relating to specific consumer or brand relationships (Aaker, Fournier & Brasel, 2004). Within consumer brand ‘involvement’, which reflects the interest levels of a consumer on a brand, major understanding has been gained by consumers because of their interests in brands (Coulter et al., 2003). However, despite the important insights gathered from ‘involvement’ research, more recently there is scholarly emphasis on shifting to concepts and theoretical perspectives which explain the dynamics describing the main interactive consumer or brand relationships, including specific social media settings (Malthouse & Hofacker, 2010).

Vivek et al. (2012: 128) believe that the concept of consumer ‘involvement’, which can also be called consumer to consumer engagement, fits well within the broader theoretical perspectives of consumer culture theory, and/ or relationship marketing because it relates to the relationships customers have with brands of their interest. Vivek et al (2012) further argue that the term of customer engagement is looked at differently by practitioners who see it as those activities

which enable interactions that are repeated to strengthen the emotional, psychological or physical investment a customer has in a brand. There are a number of behaviours that customers practice with brands to strengthen their relationship and it goes beyond the traditional customer loyalty measures, such as “frequency of visits, purchasing behaviour, and intended behaviours” (Gummerus et al., 2012: 859). One of the most popular forums in which customers engage behaviourally with companies is social media. Furthermore, Daugherty (2014: 82) says that the emergence of social media has created a two-way, many-to-many communication system, allowing consumers to connect, create, produce, and share media content online.

Moreover, social media, according to Berthon et al. (2012: 261) plays an important role in the future of marketing because, as previously mentioned, it will increase customer engagement with brands. This statement is supported by findings from authors which shows how consumers are turning away from traditional sources of advertising (Vollmer & Precourt, 2008) to new forms of advertising, on social media. Furthermore, social media allows companies to engage in “timely and direct contact with consumers at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency than could be reached through more conventional communication tools” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, 67).

b) Facebook as a Marketing and Branding Channel

As discussed, the rise of social media has brought great changes to interaction between companies and consumers (Tarvainen, 2013: 7). Moreover, Gangadharbatla (2008) argues that the emergence of social networking sites, including Facebook, has made a significant impact on the field of branding. Facebook, has become a “major factor in influencing various aspects of consumer behaviour including awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behaviour and post-purchase communication and evaluation” by engaging with

brands on brand pages (Mangold & Faulds 2009: 358). Mangold and Faulds (2009: 360-365) showed that social media marketing (SMM) is to be seen as a hybrid element of the marketing mix which supports two forms of promotion. Firstly, SMM is tied to traditional marketing promotion as a part of integrated marketing communications (IMC) which helps drive communication between organisations and its publics. Secondly, social promotion, which is “unique for social media platforms because it is embodied within consumer to consumer communication”, in other words, customers are now able to interact with organisations and other customers on a brand page (Mangold & Faulds 2009: 360-365). Most scholars have adopted the second form of promotion when referring to SMM because social media help increase brand awareness therefore, brands get to review what customers have to say about the brand and use the information to make any changes to their brand developments. Additionally, customers are able to gain information on the page and thus, spread that information via online word-of-mouth.

Furthermore, Drury (2008) argues that through Facebook, as an SMM tool, brand awareness can be created by brands through creating fan/ brand pages. These public profiles, which operate in a similar manner to individual user profiles on Facebook, allow a brand to share information and post updates, photos, and more in order to attract potential customers to ‘follow’ and/ or ‘Like’ their pages (Bushelow, 2012). Cvijikj (2012: 52) says that brand pages are “pages created by companies which offer the opportunity for a more active engagement, both on the side of the brand owner as well as the customer, who can become members of a company’s Facebook page; and engage in a direct communication with the company”. Thus, the goal for using a platform like Facebook is to enable users to connect with their favourite brands by providing “distinct, customized profiles designed for businesses to represent themselves on Facebook” (Cvijikj, 2012: 52). Furthermore, Lin (2011: 568) suggests that

people that manage and operate fan pages in a company should increase opportunities, such as advocating competitions and sales, for fans to “interact and promote the development of deeper relationships both among fans and between fans and a company”; therefore, enabling a brand to succeed amongst its competition.

Increasing interaction between fans develops relationships among fans, and between them and the brand. So, to increase the relationship and engagement between brands and its customers, brands should post regularly and content should vary in media type (status, photo, link or video) so that consumers are able to see what is being advertised in variety of ways (Cvijikj, 2012). Thus, an increased interaction between fans and brands “add value to a brand as a whole” (Bushelow, 2012: 7). Bushelow (2012) further adds that Facebook fan pages allow brands to create an online community of brand users with an infinite number of members. Fan pages help create an online presence for a brand and allow that brand to actively engage with its publics. To join a brand community, a user simply has to click on the ‘like’ button to subscribe to information and updates from the brand. Hence Kerpen (2011: 5) claims that the “‘Like’ button is a powerful tool because after it is pressed, Facebook shows the individual’s entire network, what he or she has just ‘liked’, spreading information and affiliations in a viral manner”. In agreement with Kerpen (2011), Lipsman et al. (2012: 43) explain that “by “liking” a brand, consumers can express their interest to a particular brand, communicate positive associations about a brand to others, to stay in contact with the brand, or receive specific deals or promotions”. Thus, when an individual ‘likes’ any page on Facebook, the individual’s Facebook friends can see which page that that person ‘liked’. This helps influence consumers’ brand experiences and thus, “leverage consumer’s voice for greater branding impact” (Tarvainen, 2013: 24).

Furthermore, Gangadharbatla (2008) states that marketers have the option to create ‘social ads’ which appear on users’ news feeds and thus, allows them to share it which results in users highlighting brands to their friends (Gangadharbatla, 2008). Usually, ‘liking’ a brand is motivated by existing brand loyalty or customer benefits such as discounts, competitions, and entertainment (Bushelow, 2012) but through social ads, users who may not be aware of a brand are exposed to it due to those friends who share it (Reitz, 2012).

In addition to Gangadharbatla’s (2008) argument, Cvijikj (2012) highlights the different ways in which fans engage with brands on Facebook. This could be by: “*posting* content on the wall (depending on the communication policy set by the company); *commenting* on the existing post; indicating interest(s) in a post by pressing the ‘Like’ button, in other words, *liking*; and lastly, *sharing* the post on their profile wall” (Cvijikj, 2012: 54). Each of these actions increases the reach of content by creating a visible trace on a user’s wall thus, making it visible to all of his or her friends (Cvijikj, 2012).

Consequently, Facebook has “brought to managers’ attention the emergent need for pro-actively ‘engaging’ consumers, by letting them create content and become vanguards for the different brands” (Gangadharbatla, 2008: 31). Gangadharbatla (2008) adds that in association with this, managers are more focused on assisting Facebook users to create conversations about brands between each other – which, as mentioned earlier, is considered more effective than traditional one-way commercial and media channels. This is more effective because marketers are able to see consumers’ opinions on their brands thus, allows to also see what changes they can make regarding their brands. However, allowing users to create brand conversations amongst themselves is arguably a ‘scary’ thought for managers (Gangadharbatla 2008) because

it limits the amount of control companies have over content produced and the spreading of information (Mangold & Faulds 2009).

2.5 Conclusion

To conclude, networks as a whole, have had an impact in changing people's lives. In the network society, it is unlikely that people can reject the need for social relationships based on physical location because it has been argued that "many relationships with origins from online move to offline and vice versa" (Castells, 2004: 229). In addition, when social ties are analysed as networks, and also when the Internet is considered as one form of communication amongst many other forms of communication, computer-mediated communication always supports the formation of a larger, and more diverse social network, such as Facebook (Castells, 2004: 229). Furthermore, Facebook has proven to be the most used and dependent social networking site globally, thus this chapter managed to unpack on how users interact with brands within brand pages and what motivates them to interact with those specific brands. Therefore, with the development of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), it is clear that it has considerable influence on consumer buying and communication behaviour because the message can reach a large number of people on social networks all at once. Such functionality can help marketers reach their target market faster than traditional WOM. Moreover, with the use of Castells' (2004) work, the process of understanding how societies can be interpreted as networked societies rather than individuals or traditional communities helped to explain how societies form certain networks to become one community.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This research has already outlined arguments surrounding brand engagement on social networking sites. Thus, this chapter focuses on the research methodology used to answer the research questions of this dissertation. This chapter sets to discover how UKZN Pietermaritzburg students use Facebook to engage with brands; with the objectives aimed to find out which brands students engage with most on Facebook; what features draw students to interact with brands on Facebook; how networks like Facebook, help facilitate sharing; and what types of brands students choose to share with their network? And why? Additionally, this study is best suited to a mixed methods approach, grounded in ethnography. This chapter will further outline and describe research philosophies, the choice of methods to be used for my analysis, the methodological tools suitable for my study, and its limitations.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Saunders et al. (2009: 107) argues that research philosophy involves the way researchers collect, interpret, and analyse collected data. Research philosophy is thus, used to explain the “development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge” (Saunders et al., 2009: 107). According to Denscombe (1998), researchers need to understand three main concepts (refer to *Figure 1* below) that lie at the heart of research philosophies: ontology, epistemology and paradigm. This also includes the main philosophical positions in social research (Denscombe, 1998). These are important to understand in order to come up with the most relevant for my research, therefore I will unpack on what each of them mean.

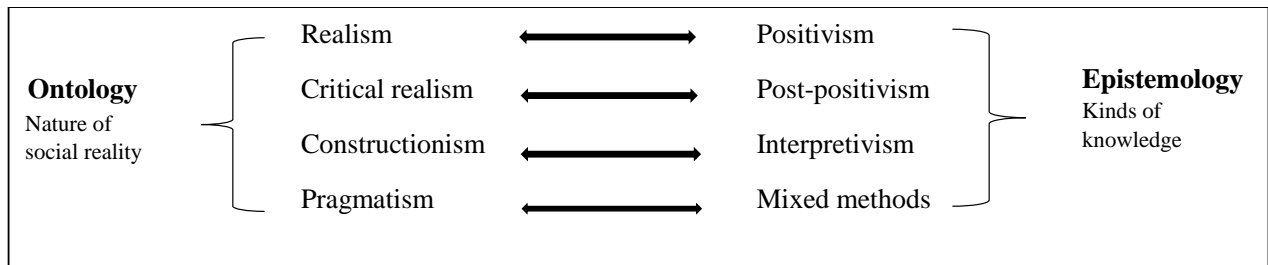


Figure 1: A simplified model of basic social research philosophies

3.2.1 Ontology, Epistemology and Paradigms

According to Denscombe (1998: 118) ontology refers to the “social phenomena and the beliefs that researchers hold about the nature of social reality”. This means that this philosophy focuses on the researchers’ perceptions about how things exist and how those things work together in social reality (Sutrisna, 2009: 7; Saunders et al., 2009: 109). Additionally, it is the way in which the researcher defines truth and reality (Antwi and Hamza, 2015: 218). However, due to debates between social researchers surrounding the issue of ontology, two basic positions were determined. Firstly, realism explores the social world as something that exists ‘out there’ – “an objective reality that exists independently of whether any particular individual believes in it or even approves of it” (Denscombe, 1998: 119). And secondly, constructivism which considers how the social world is something humans create. In other words, reality is constructed by how people see the world and thus, is “reinforced by their interaction with people” (Denscombe, 1998: 119). In addition, social reality is something that can be produced and re-produced over and over and is something that will always be there as long as people continuously create it through their actions, beliefs and their words (Denscombe, 1998).

Other researchers however, prefer an epistemological approach through which people create and acquire knowledge in trying to make sense of the way the world functions (Saunders et al.,

2009: 112). According to Denscombe (1998), this philosophy is not entirely concerned with what social reality 'is' but the logic behind having the ability to obtain the knowledge of what it truly is. There are two fundamental positions within this philosophy, positivism and interpretivism. Positivism refers to social research that uses a repeatable scientific method to gain knowledge and tests hypotheses by means of data which takes the form of quantitative measurements (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009: 342). Often, positivism is used well with realist ontology because social reality is seen as "something that exists 'out there' with properties that lend themselves to being objectively measured" (Denscombe, 1998: 119). Interpretivism however, is different because it regards what people know about the social world as something that depends on how humans are capable to 'make sense' of a reality, "which in itself, [has] no order or structure" (Denscombe, 1998: 119). Research states that it is only by *interpreting* the world that people can know anything that exists, because the knowledge that people have about reality is produced rather than discovered.

Lastly, research paradigms are understood as "patterns or models for research" (Denscombe, 1998: 130-131) and on the other hand, Mertens (2005: 7) describes paradigms as "a way of looking at the world. It comprises of particular philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking and action". Therefore, there are two main paradigms: quantitative and qualitative (Denscombe, 1998: 130-131). Firstly, a quantitative research paradigm involves a basic belief of numeral data collection (Antwi and Hamza, 2015). This research approach, according to Antwi & Hamza (2015: 220), "follows a confirmatory scientific method because its focus is on hypothesis testing and theory testing". Moreover, this research approach is linked to realist ontology and positivistic epistemology as they work on the idea that the social phenomena exists 'out-there' and its availability allows for researchers to use methods to measure them (Denscombe, 1998: 132).

In contrast, a qualitative research paradigm looks at how people see and shape the world (Denscombe, 1998: 132). Because it “involves a preference for data in a form of words, text and images,” it helps to gain a depth understanding as to how complex the social world is (Denscombe, 1998: 132). Thus, it is used when there is not much known about a particular topic or when the researcher wants to determine and/ or learn more about a topic (Antwi and Hamza, 2015). Additionally, it is mostly used to “understand people’s experiences and to express their perspectives” (Antwi and Hamza, 2015: 220). This paradigm favours a constructionist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology because it highlights the ways in which “human activity creates meaning and generates the social order that characterises the world we live in” (Denscombe, 1998: 132-133).

Furthermore, a qualitative research looks at the setting of one's research from a viewpoint of deeper understanding rather than micro-analysis of limited variables (Denscombe, 1998). The researcher is drawn by the stories and the experiences of people in a natural setting (Schurink, 2009). In addition, this study is grounded in ethnography because it “focuses on understanding what people believe and think, and how they live their daily lives” (Brennan, 2013: 159). The most important “feature of an ethnographic study is describing and interpreting cultural behaviour” (Schurink, 2009: 811) by answering the ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions.

3.3 Research Design

With that been said, my study is best fitted to a paradigm philosophy, because it includes both a quantitative and qualitative research design which is known as mixed method research, considered as the “third wave” or third research paradigm (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Creswell and Clark (2011) point out that this approach helps a researcher get more evidence to the problems they are investigating, and also it provides them with the ability to understand the

interchange between variables of the study. Hence, the mixed methods epistemology can be linked to pragmatism ontology because it allows researchers to not look at the world as a complete unity, rather it provides them with the ability to collect and analyse data using different approaches (Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, Creswell (2003) adds that with a mixed method, the study should begin with a broad survey in order to get a general spectrum of results to a population, and then soon after, the focus should shift to a detailed qualitative analysis with open-ended interviews in order to collect views from participants. This means that researchers should first survey a large number of participants, then follow up with a few of them divided into a group(s), of who show interest in your study “to obtain their specific language and voices about the topic” (Creswell, 2003: 22).

3.3.1 Mixed Methods Design for the Study

The mixed method design that best suits my research is called explanatory sequential mixed methods (a two-phased mixed method approach). In this approach, in the first phase, a researcher collects quantitative data then analyses the results to build into the second phase as shown in *Image 1* below.

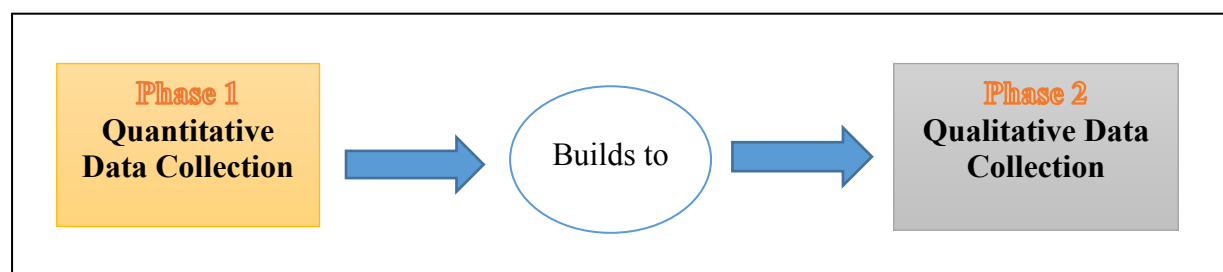


Image 1: An Explanatory sequential design

3.4 Sampling

In relation to this study, the aim to find out which brands students engage with most on Facebook; what features draw students to interact with brands on Facebook; how networks like Facebook, help facilitate sharing; and what types of brands students choose to share with their network? And why? Therefore, in order to answer these questions, purposive sampling, also known as typical-case sampling (Deacon et al, 1999), was used. According to Latham (2007) purposive sampling was used to select a sample based on one's own knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of your research aims. Therefore, I used UKZN Pietermaritzburg students from different Colleges to help answer my key research questions. The focus was only on undergraduate students, "as they are generally the heaviest users of the site" (Rigby, 2008: 187). However, as the research went on, I also included a number of postgraduate students to create a more representative sample of UKZN students.

3.5 Methodological Tools

The methodological tools that best suited my research were questionnaires and focus groups. The importance of both tools is that, questionnaires allow data collection on larger scale of participants while focus groups measure participants' reactions to one another's answers.

3.5.1 Questionnaire

The reason for using questionnaire was because it gave me the option to collect data from a wider range of participants (Quinlan, 2011: 96). Because Sarantakos (2005) suggests that one of the requirements for a questionnaire format is that questions should be arranged in a logical order, my questionnaires followed this format to allow participants to have a better understanding of the aims of my research and thus, participants discreetly answered questions

to the end (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2005). Consequently, because my study is suited to an explanatory sequential research framework, I used a combination of closed and open-ended questions because it “provides the survey write-up with quantifiable and in-depth results” (Bird, 2009: 1311). Additionally, Bird (2009: 1311) states that using closed questions helps create results that are summarised very easily when analysing and coding and thus are “clearly presented in quick-look summaries, while open questions generate exact word-for-word comments adding depth and meaning”. The questions were set up in such a way that participants were explained to, in the beginning of the sessions, as to what the acronyms such as WOM (word-of-mouth) and eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) meant, refer to *appendix 1*. However, because questionnaires are limited in terms of generating in-depth feedback, it was decided that focus groups would help create a richer data.

3.5.2 Focus groups

According to Thomas et al. (1995) a focus group is a technique that entails the use of in-depth group interviews whereby selected participants are picked purposively. Moreover, the reason for using a focus group rather than other methods of interviewing in this research was because it helped generate open discussions and measure participants' reactions to one another's answers (refer to *appendix 2* for full copy of the questionnaire). Furthermore, Brennan (2013: 73) argues that “focus groups [...] ask questions to facilitate the group dynamics in order to encourage group members to fully interact with each other”. Consequently, before conducting the focus groups, a question guide was created to help determine how I wanted my focus groups to proceed but still remain flexible enough to explore new ideas that might come up during the session (Brennan, 2013). I followed a *funnel design*, “whereby the discussion flows from broad, general issues to more specific and focussed issues” (Hennink, 2007: 50).

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

To collect my data, I first handed out a questionnaire to 105 students across three colleges, Humanities, Law, Management and IT, and Agriculture, Science and Engineering at UKZN Pietermaritzburg campus. The aim was to equally distribute 35 surveys per college, in order to collect general information about the students and their interaction with brands on Facebook brand pages. However, Agriculture, Science and Engineering College was dominant with 42 participants that portrayed more interest in the study. Once the first phase of data collection was done, I moved to phase two, collecting qualitative data from focus groups. Three focus groups were conducted consisting of between 4 to 10 participants. The first group consisted of Law, Management and IT and Humanities students while the second group consisted of a combination of all three colleges. And the final group consisted of only students from the Agriculture, Science and Engineering department. Moreover, participants for my focus groups were selected from those people who expressed interest in partaking in my focus group and whose answers from the questionnaires expressed insights in relation to brand engagement.

3.7 Data Analysis

During this process, a structural analysis was done whereby codes/ themes were identified and categorised according to patterns or to find commonalities between participants' answers (Sarantakos, 2005). Firstly, a statistical analysis of questionnaires was done in which information was gathered from the questionnaires and themes surrounding brand engagement and influence, popular brands, and self-perceived behaviour were identified which inspired questions asked in focus groups.

Furthermore, Blum (2005) suggests that a theme of significance can be identified in responses when one counts the population of participants in the research study and thus, provide the same or close responses. With each theme, the researcher can identify a sub-theme or a category to explain the doings of a participant(s). A researcher can also describe a pattern or add counts of percentages in a way of narrative (Blum, 2005). An outlier, on the other hand, can be a response given by one or few of the respondents (Blum, 2005). However, more themes are expected to emerge during my focus group which will help create interesting results to compare with the established norms regarding brand engagement found in my literature review.

- Quantitative Analysis

A sample of 105 participants was selected across all three colleges to partake in the study. During the data collection, there were patterns discovered amongst participants where majority of students stated that they ‘followed’ and shared brands with their friends. They listed Facebook as their primary platform for engaging with brands however, this was done in combination with other social media platforms. In contrast, majority of students from Law, Management and IT and Agriculture, Science and Engineering departments highlighted that they preferred to use Instagram in combination with Facebook over other platforms for visual purposes. Furthermore, participants mentioned that there were features that drew them to engaging with popular brands and that was because of leisure purposes, competition, promotions, sales and exclusive savings. Additionally, Candy Crusher was believed to be a popular game amongst participants because they engaged with it for competing purposes.

- Qualitative Results

After surveys were collected, three focus groups were conducted whereby 19 students were selected to participate. Each group contained of 6 participants from the first focus group, 9 participants in the second focus group and 4 participants in the final focus group. Therefore, themes surrounding brand engagement behaviours, popular brands, Facebook for social interaction and self-perceived behaviour were discovered. All these participants stated that they ‘followed’ brands in some form of social media channel however, Facebook was mentioned to be the primary platform to engage with brands. Majority of students however, mentioned that they have shifted from Facebook to ‘follow’ brands to other platforms such as Instagram for reasons such as visual purposes and clear information on brands. Thus, marketers need to integrate these platforms to their marketing mix to maintain long-term relationships with their audiences and further, this discovery will help find the gap in the market.

Moreover, participants mentioned that they preferred using electronic word-of-mouth to communicate with companies and spread relevant information to other consumers. However, other participants highlighted that both forms of communications were effective based on trustworthiness. In addition, majority of students mentioned that what motivated them to engage with popular brands was because of brand awareness strategies marketers use to attract audience. Consequently, participants mentioned that their attitudes toward engaging with brands was constituted by brand loyalty, as an element of a self-perceived behaviour.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

For ethical purposes, according to Brennan (2013: 70), “informed consent is pivotal to the focus group processes”. Therefore, it is essential for researchers to provide participants with accurate

information of their study, in other words, I first addressed what my research entailed to my participants. Thereafter, I distributed consent forms from the University to individuals to sign stating that if they felt uncomfortable answering surveys and partaking in my focus groups, they had the right to pull out of the research. Moreover, these students were made aware of the study and had agreed to be observed.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented on research methodology such as questionnaires and focus groups that were used for this study. Therefore, it highlighted critical research elements such as research philosophies and the one that best suited my study was paradigm, in a mixed method. In addition, a sample was drawn from the UKZN Pietermaritzburg campus. Further, a section on data collection procedures showed how data was collected and thus, analysed. So, the following chapter will interpret empirical results.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

The focus of this research was to identify how students at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus interact with brands on Facebook. It has been observed that people get their trend updates and connect with other people through social networking sites, such as Facebook and thus, brands are now turning to social networking sites to increase their interaction with customers (Bushelow, 2012). According to Keller (2001) research has shown that marketers have a huge impact on consumers to engage and become “followers” of brands by positioning their brand advertising with what consumers are passionate about across a wide array of channels. The list of objectives the empirical study has aimed to answer are: which brands do students engage with most on Facebook; what features draw students to interact with brands on Facebook; how networks like Facebook, help facilitate sharing; and what types of brands do students choose to share with their network? And why?

The chapter begins with an analysis of information gathered from the questionnaires, and highlights themes that emerged from the questions answered by the participants in focus groups. Since three colleges were used to collect data, the participants’ statistical information is divided into their colleges. Thereafter, the chapter moves over to focus group discussions. Moreover, once this analysis is complete, the chapter will discuss and interpret findings in relation to the literature discussed in chapter 2.

4.2 Data Analysis

4.2.1 Quantitative Results: Surveys

4.2.1.1 Introduction

In this section of my analysis, it shows survey results of social networks students use to ‘follow’ and share brands per college, and *Figure 1* below shows results of students’ responses to the survey. Therefore, 107 surveys were distributed across three colleges, whereby two were not returned. Only 83 participants (see Table 1) answered the question on ‘following’ brands on their networks. However, of the 83 participants, Table 2 presents results of 62 participants who ‘follow’ and share brands. Furthermore, in the sub-sections is a discussion of my survey findings according to three colleges. The aim was to discover the number of students that ‘followed’ and shared brands with their friends on social media per college and which social network platform was used most to engage with brands. Thereafter, find out which popular brands students engage with most on Facebook. Secondly, illustrated in *Figure 2* is the types of brands students ‘followed’ and shared with their friends. Finally, features that drew students to engage with brands.

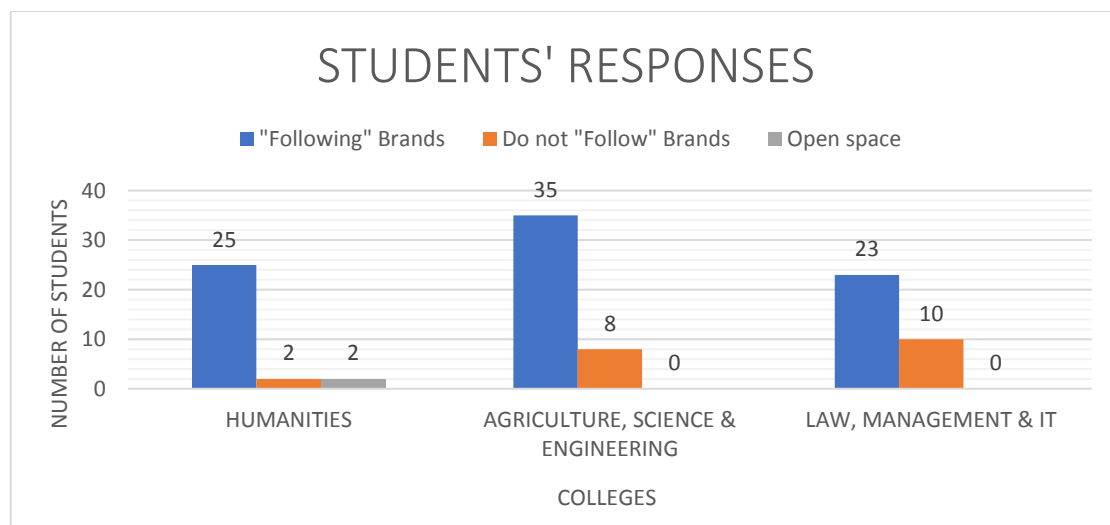


Figure 1

Table 1: Illustrates Social Networks Students used to “Follow” Brands per College

	COLLEGES						
	Humanities		Law, Management & IT		Agriculture, Science & Engineering		
Social Networks:	Participants	Participants’ Rate	Participants	Participants’ Rate	Participants	Participants’ Rate	TOTAL Number of Participants
<i>Facebook Only</i>	15	60%	10	43.4%	20	57%	45
<i>Twitter Only</i>	1	4%	0	0%	3	9%	4
<i>Instagram Only</i>	2	8%	5	21.7%	1	2.8%	8
<i>Facebook & Twitter</i>	3	12%	3	13%	0	0%	6
<i>Facebook & Instagram</i>	3	12%	2	9%	8	22.8%	13
<i>Facebook & LinkedIn</i>	0	0%	1	4.3%	1	2.8%	2
<i>Twitter & Instagram</i>	1	4%	1	4.3%	1	2.8%	3
<i>Facebook, Twitter & LinkedIn</i>	0	0%	0	0%	1	2.8%	1

<i>Facebook, Twitter & Instagram</i>	0	0%	1	4.3%	0	0%	1
<i>TOTAL Number of Participants per College</i>	25		23		35		83

Table 2: Illustrates Social Networks Students used to Share Brands per College

COLLEGES

	Humanities		Law, Management & IT		Agriculture, Science & Engineering		
Social Networks:	Participants	Participants' Rate	Participants	Participants' Rate	Participants	Participants' Rate	TOTAL Number of Participants
<i>Facebook Only</i>	15	71.5%	10	66.7%	15	58%	40
<i>Twitter Only</i>	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%	1
<i>Instagram Only</i>	2	9.5%	2	13.3%	1	4%	5
<i>Facebook & Twitter</i>	2	9.5%	0	0%	0	0%	2

<i>Facebook & Instagram</i>	2	9.5%	1	6.7%	7	26%	10
<i>Twitter & Instagram</i>	0	0%	1	6.7%	1	4%	2
<i>Facebook, Twitter & LinkedIn</i>	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%	1
<i>Facebook, Twitter & Instagram</i>	0	0%	1	6.7%	0	0%	1
<i>TOTAL Number of Participants per College</i>	21		15		26		62

1. Survey Findings: College of Humanities

As noted in Table 1, 25 students from the College of Humanities ‘followed’ brands on social media. While majority of students (15) used Facebook to ‘follow’ brands, survey results highlighted that this was done in combination with other social networks such as Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. However, what is most interesting is that postgraduate students in the College tended to use one platform, Facebook. On the other hand, those undergraduate students who listed Facebook as their primary social media platform were slightly older than those undergraduates who preferred platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. Furthermore, this suggests that younger users are less likely to engage with Facebook only and brands should integrate other platforms into their marketing mix to maintain relationships with targeted audiences.

As illustrated in Table 2, 21 students ‘followed’ and shared brands on social media. It was discovered that majority of the students (15) used Facebook, in combination with other social networks, to share brand pages to spread brand awareness about the brand; for updates on latest trends and new arrivals from the brands; to alert their friends of available competitions. However, the few students who do not share brands stated that this is because they see no reason for their interests to be known online, while others said they share different interests in brands with their friends. Furthermore, it was interesting to discover that majority of students preferred to share their favourite brands on those platforms to connect with other consumers for advice on the brand. And this suggests that brands may be able to find a gap on where to improve through market research.

Moreover, it is evident from *Figure 2* that majority of students (16) ‘followed’ Media brands such as movies, online newspapers, news from the South African Broadcasting Company (SABC) and eNCA, over other brands for relevance of their everyday lives. For brands that report on the news, students stated that they ‘followed’ them for news updates and thus, allows them to share any relevant information with their friends. And for brands that offer entertainment such as movies, event experience, and games such as Candy Crusher as one of the most popular games amongst participants on Facebook, 36% of students said they ‘followed’ them for leisure purposes. While 56% of students also mentioned that they ‘followed’ entertainment brands for competition and special savings purposes, especially from product, retail and media brands.

2. Survey Findings: College of Law, Management and IT

As illustrated in Table 1, 23 students in this College ‘followed’ brands on social media. Survey results showed that majority of participants (10) preferred to use Facebook as their primary social networking site, while others preferred to use Facebook, in combination with other social media platforms, to engage with brands. What was interesting to discover was that undergraduate students from this College shifted from using other social media platforms such as Twitter, to using Instagram as a secondary platform to engage with brands for visual purposes thus, brands need to be aware that their younger audiences have shifted to other platforms for that reason.

Furthermore, using Table 2 as point of reference, 15 participants ‘followed’ and shared brands with their friends on social media channels. It was observed that majority of participants (10) used Facebook to ‘follow’ and share brands, however, an outlier was discovered of one

participant that does not ‘follow’ brands but only shares them with her friends. This is because she wants to spread valuable information to her friends and also for them to be aware of any latest trends, competitions or discounts from brands, as she noticed that that is how brands lure people into brand engagement. Others mentioned that they share brands that are relative to their lifestyles and that of their friends. These students claim that posts from the brand pages either benefit or educate them and thus, allows them to promote African and international brands to their friends with less knowledge of the brands. On the other hand, other participants stated that they do not share brands because what may be appealing to them, may not be appealing to their friends. While others mentioned that their friends may be unfamiliar with brands they share.

As shown in *Figure 2*, majority of students (13) ‘follow’ product brands, such as BMW, Coca Cola, Sony, Nike, Simba, KFC, McDonald’s over other brands for exclusive savings, promotions and relevant competitions. These types of brands allow students to regularly engage with them due to their exclusive offers as people enjoy free goods or special offers on products. Further, for brands that offer entertainment, 39% participants said they also ‘followed’ them for events experiences and contests. In regard to events such as Eyadini, that participants mentioned, allowed them the experience of relaxation, whereby they get to enjoy braaied meat, listen to good music and meet celebrity guests that would appear later to perform. And also, Eyadini gives them the township experience. However, what was interesting was that postgraduate students ‘followed’ entertainment brands for special savings and good offers, and these are mostly on product and retail brands.

3. Survey Findings: College of Agriculture, Science and Engineering

In the College of Agriculture, Science and Engineering, Table 1 shows that 35 students ‘followed’ brands on social media, and majority of participants (20) preferred using Facebook as their primary platform. It was evident from the survey results that students from this department also preferred to use Facebook, in combination with Instagram over other platforms. As one of the participants in the College of Law, Management and IT previously mentioned that Instagram is best for visuals and information posted on it is clear for viewers, it is evident that about 23% of participants from this College agree. Hence, brands need to shift or integrate other social media platforms to their marketing mix.

Moreover, this College is more dominant than other Colleges with regards to students that ‘followed’ and shared brands on social media. Therefore, Table 2 illustrates a total of 26 students that said they ‘follow’ and share brands with their friends on social media platforms. Survey results show that majority of students (15) preferred to use Facebook to ‘follow’ and share brands however, they also preferred to use Instagram in combination with Facebook. They share these brands to allow their friends to experience the benefits brands have to offer. Others share for buying purposes and they claim that brands they engage with are of high value, hence they share for their friends to know more about the brands. Some participants mentioned that they do not share brands, they only want to be informed about specials and competitions. While others said they do not share because they do not feel the need to spam other people with their likes and brand preferences. One postgraduate student mentioned that he does not share anymore with his friends because they do not “like” the pages at all.

Looking at *Figure 2*, it shows that majority of students (24) ‘followed’ Media brands, while others ‘followed’ product brands with 19 students. This highlights that these students also ‘followed’ these brands, Media brands, for news updates, and movie specials at cinemas, and product brands for competitions, discounts and specials on products or services. This suggests that brands need to align their advertising strategies more to the interests of their audiences in order to maintain a long-term relationship.

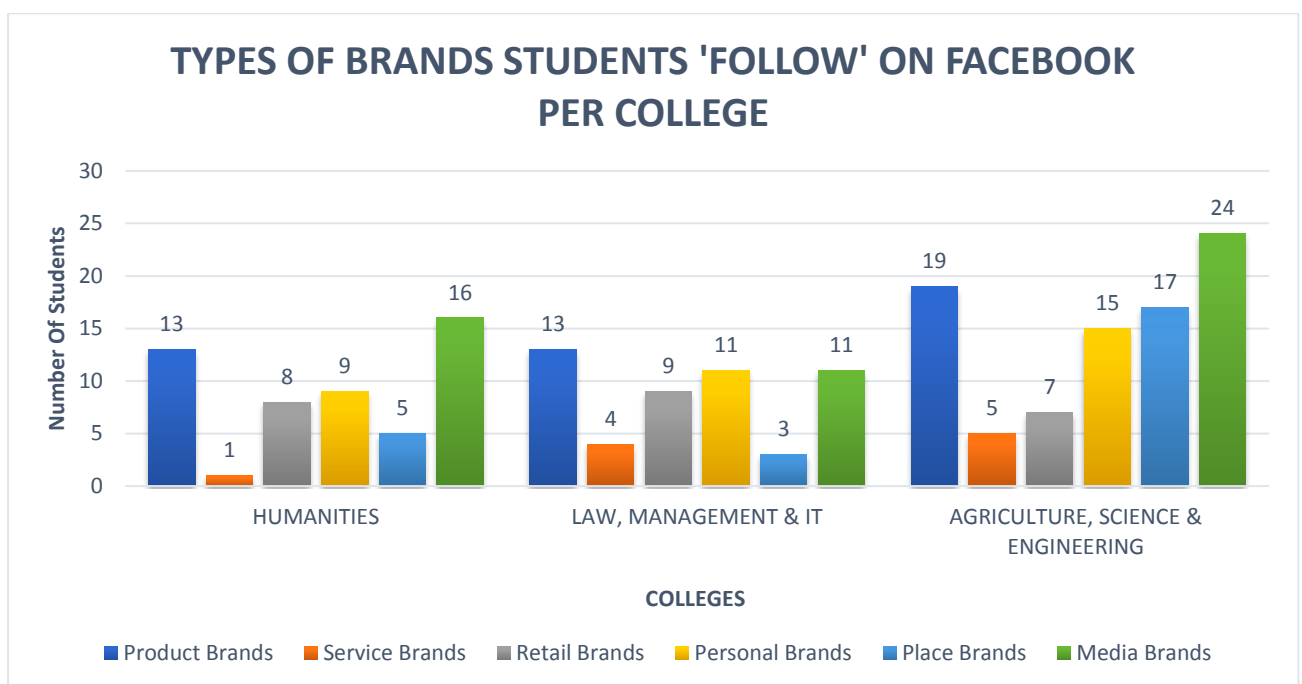


Figure 2

Moreover, as observed in the survey results in all three Colleges, participants mentioned that features that drew them to sharing brands are trends through entertainment brands. As shown in *Figure 3* below, majority of participants (30) login to Facebook every day to check for popular trends, such as upcoming events, competitions, special savings and/ or compete on Candy Crusher for the highest score. Thereafter, share their experiences with their friends.

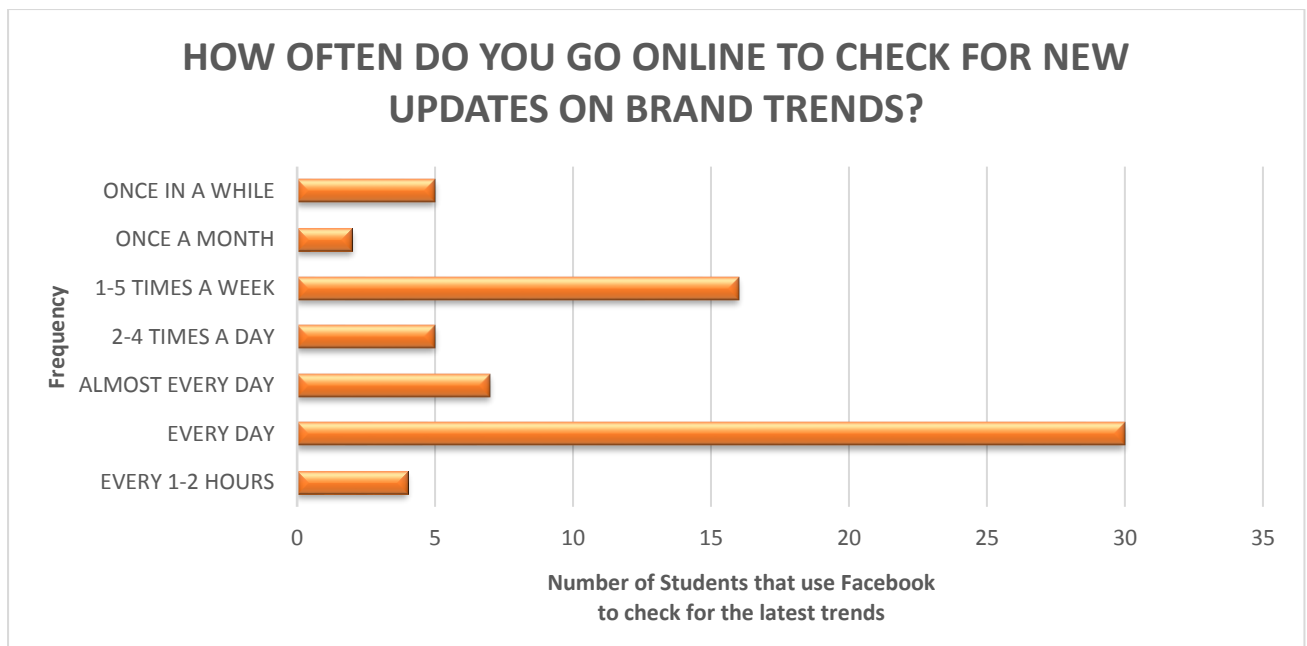


Figure 3

4.2.1.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, all participants mentioned that they used Facebook as their primary social media platform for engaging with brands. However, participants from College of Agriculture, Science and Engineering and College of Law, Management and IT mentioned said that they preferred to use Instagram over other platforms for visual purposes. Furthermore, majority of students mentioned that they mostly ‘followed’ media and product brands for leisure purposes, latest trends, promotions, competitions, and exclusive savings such as discounts from brands. Therefore, to maintain a long-term relationship with targeted audience, it is important for marketers to integrate other social networking sites to their marketing mix and thus, align their advertising strategies to the interests of those audience.

4.2.2 Qualitative Results: Focus Groups

4.2.2.1 Introduction

The questions asked in the focus groups were based on answers from questionnaires by students who expressed insights relating brand engagement on social media. These questions also included themes such as brand engagement and influence, popular brands, and self-perceived behaviour; which emerged during the preliminary data collection phase, and the results will follow below. Furthermore, this section provides a more in-depth understanding based on reasons students across all three colleges provided on whether they ‘followed’ or did not ‘follow’ brands on social networks.

The focus of the research was to discover how University of Kwa-Zulu Natal’s Pietermaritzburg students use Facebook to engage with brands. With great insights from responses from my questionnaire participants, I found it important to further look more on whether students ‘follow’ brands or not, brands they mostly engage with, and social network platform used most to engage with these brands. And finally, determine which features, from popular brands, draw students to interact with on Facebook. From this information the researcher hoped to evaluate the types of brands students choose to share with their network, and why, and that will determine the impact these brands have on students’ self-perceived behaviour as loyal consumers. Moreover, themes of significance and outliers were identified from the results. Blum (2005) posits that when identifying a theme of significance in the responses one must count how often participants provide the same or similar responses. On the other hand, outliers can be a response given by one or few of the respondents (Blum, 2005). These two categories are the foundation for the research chapter and they will help lead to the findings.

a) Themes of significance.

The first objective of the study was to establish if students ‘followed’ brands, and which social network platform was used most to engage with brands. The second objective was to discover features, from popular brands, drew students to interact with on Facebook, and why they chose to communicate with these brands. Lastly, the types of brands students chose to share with their network, and why, and that will determine the impact these brands have on students’ self-perceived behaviour as loyal consumers. All 19 participants who were selected to take part in the focus groups ‘followed’ brands in some form of social media. Using *Figure 4* below as illustration, 68% (13) of participants from the groups stated that they use Facebook to ‘follow’ and engage with brands. However, it was uncovered that social networks such as Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn were used as alternative platforms for ‘following’, interacting and then sharing brands. Therefore, 32% (6) said they preferred to use these other social networking sites to engage with brands.

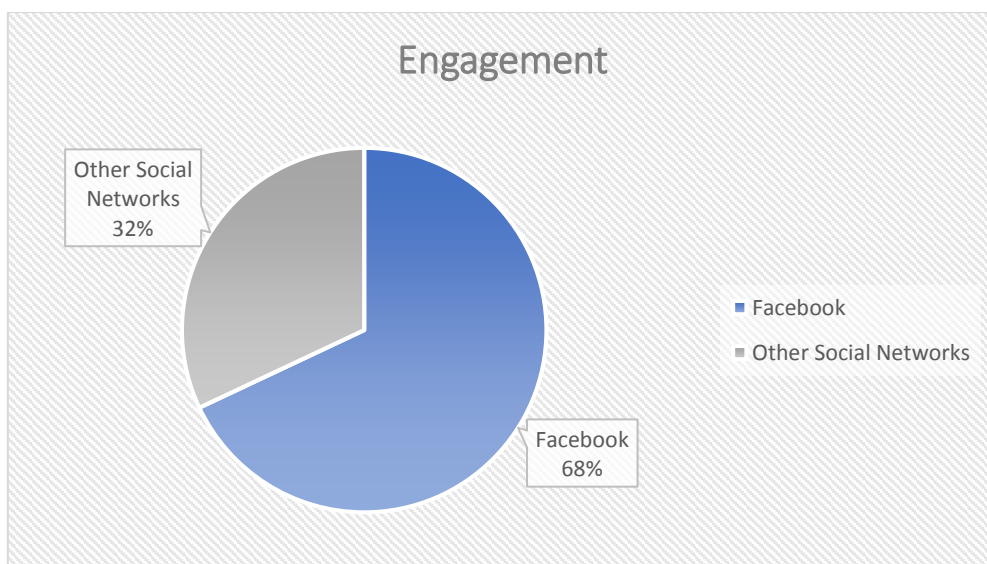


Figure 4

The majority of postgraduate students from Agriculture, Science and Engineering department expressed that they mostly ‘followed’ and interacted with media brands such as movies, online newspapers, news from the South African Broadcasting Company (SABC) and eNCA and therefore, for brands that report on news, students stated that they ‘followed’ them for factual issues, health issues and current affairs. However, undergraduate students from Humanities and Law, Management and IT department expressed their interest in ‘following’ and interacting only with retail and personal brands. They preferred using other social networks instead of Facebook because information provided for brands offer better insights, and these platforms are also more visual. Furthermore, what was interesting to discover was that these students were influenced by brands’ posts and details provided on the pages. So, this suggests that younger users have shifted to using other social media platforms such as Instagram over Facebook and therefore, marketers need to be aware of the shift.

b) Outliers

It was discovered that there was a participant from focus group 3 who stated that they only ‘followed’ brands on Facebook but does not share them with his friends.

Accordingly, there was confusion amongst participants on branding and self-promotion because they saw LinkedIn as platform for branding. However, LinkedIn is a platform where people can promote themselves for job opportunities and/ or keep contact with the people in professional fields. To confirm this confusion, for example, during group discussions, one of the participants explained that

“I didn’t understand what you meant by brands in the beginning of the session.”

Therefore, I managed to explain the difference between branding and brands, and all participants in a form of head nod showed understanding of the terms.

Moreover, during the discussions, when looking at trends on social media, 60% of participants stated that they go online to check for updates on the latest trends depending on the type of brands they ‘followed’. For participants that ‘followed’ product and retail brands explained that they receive notifications on the latest popular fashion trends and competitions and therefore, for the amount of times they log on to their Facebook pages, they notice new clothes posted by fashion brands, also competitions from the brands. Some participants highlighted that they observed that for brands that they ‘followed’ the most, for new updates, they contacted them directly and this is important for them as they do not miss out on latest fashion trends, sales or competitions.

However, the rest of the participants (40%) said that brands usually post about their products because they want to generate interaction between ‘followers’ for sales purposes. They update their consumers on products that are trending or on their new products. Generally, new products are promoted through product trials which may lead consumers to buy these products and marketers do this for market research purposes. Thus, through reviews, brands get to see where they can make improvements or whether it will mostly sell or not.

The section below is an analysis of all focus groups discussions focusing on answering the key research questions: 1. Do students ‘follow’ brands, and which social network platform was used most to engage with brands. 2. Which features, from popular brands, draw students to interact with on Facebook, and why they choose to communicate with these brands. 3. What types of brands do students choose to share with their network, and why? And what will determine the impact these brands have on students’ self-perceived behaviour as loyal consumers was evaluated.

1. Discussion from Focus Group 1

i) Brand Engagement

There were 6 students that participated in this focus group and all stated that they ‘followed’ and shared brands on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. They said that they shared brands with their friends to spread information about their favourite brands however, others said they only ‘followed’ brands. Therefore, one of the reasons for using other social network platforms to engage with brands, besides Facebook, was that according to participant 4

“It makes it easier for users to see what they have for you, as that will be on your ‘explore’; then you can go onto their brand pages and look at their products and what they will be promoting at the time.”

Moreover, this process of brand engagement is built through the motivation behind ‘following’ brands combining communication, satisfaction, experience and brand awareness (Vukasović, 2013). In other words, what motivated these students to engage with brands was for brand

awareness strategies companies use such as product sales and competitions, to attract audiences because they required more information about brands, hence participant 1 said

“Big sales, new arrivals and trends from the brands in the stores; Cotton-On always has specials on clothes which happens every two weeks, and when you buy one product, you get another one for free.”

On the other hand, participant 3 said Facebook and other social networks

“... get their visibility through competitions from popular brands and suggesting the page to their ‘followers’. This allows those people to tag their friends then those friends share with their friends.”

What also motivated these participants to engage with brands was how easily they could access a brand page on Instagram, unlike on Facebook that takes a while to access information on. She explained that

“...even if you are ‘following’ the brand on Facebook, it takes a while to go on to their pages as you have to go to the search engine; only then will you find out information about what will be trending or being advertised.”

a) Social interaction

The majority of students argued that electronic word-of-mouth is more effective than traditional word-of-mouth with regards to gaining and spreading information however, there were a few that still believe that traditional WOM is more effective because of the personal touch, such as facial expressions and the trustworthiness of their social circle (Svensson, 2011). For participants who said eWOM is more effective in line with Svensson (2011), this form of

communication allows interaction with larger groups of audience on brand pages all at once.

And in support of this statement, participant 2 mentioned that

“Electronic word-of-mouth is more effective because we are in that era where technology has taken over our lives and everything is done electronically, albeit buying a product or even selling your old stuff. And with this type of communication, you get to interact with a lot of people on the brand page all at the same time and that helps gain information from them thus enables you to spread it to your friends on their Facebook timelines [...] And information can be spread faster than traditional word-of-mouth.”

Furthermore, participant 6 mentioned that eWOM has a major effect on the way people look up to trendsetters, in other words, people that start, spread a new fashion style or help it become popular (Saez-Trumper et al., 2012). Fashion and trends stimulate online activity (interaction) on Facebook because ‘followers’ look at the clothes celebrities wear, and clothing lines that some celebrities produce. They engage with these brands because they want to know more about them, for example participant 6 stated that

“online trendsetters such as AKA, seeing what they are wearing stimulates more conversation and that can affect my attitude towards engaging with a brand that they promote.”

ii) Popular brands

Participants said that features which drew them to brands is how active other ‘followers’ are on brand pages. In other words, the commentaries from other participants drew them to find

out more about the brands – re-affirming Park et al. (2011), they argue that this can assist in consumption-related advises.

The majority of participants said they mostly ‘followed’ retail brands such as Mr Price, Spree, Foschini, Legit and Edgars. Participants mentioned that they ‘follow’ these brands for fashion trends, and sales on clothes; Media brands such as eNCA and Newspapers – The Witness and Daily Sun, SABC news. However, with product brands such as Coca Cola, Nike, Mercedes Benz, Spur, Star Bucks, Ster Kinekor, Food Lovers, Addidas, and Markhams. one participant mentioned that she ‘followed’ these brands for promotions on the products. On the other hand, participant 5 added that he ‘followed’ place brands

“such as Cruiseabout for travelling purposes because I enjoy seeing new places and learning about other people’s cultures and traditions.”

In contrast, other participants said they do not use Facebook to ‘follow’ brands because their pages are never appealing and therefore, provide vague information about their products. Participant 2 mentioned that the reason for this is because

“Marketers have realised that there is a shift. In other words, younger users have shifted from using Facebook to ‘follow’ brands to promoting them on Instagram. They are more popular on Instagram than they are on Facebook.”

This shift in social networking sites has led to students finding the importance of linking accounts for brand updates. In support of participant 2’s statement, participant 4 added that

“Before the age of Instagram, when I used to go onto the brand page on Facebook, the posts did not come out as appealing or drew me to knowing more about what they were advertising. I no longer pressed on the “Like” button because the content was so vague thus, I scrolled down and halfway I would lose interest, especially with Fashion, I want to be enticed by what I see but Facebook no longer give me that. That is why now I linked my Instagram account with my Facebook.”

Additionally, participants mentioned that they interacted with the brands because of the benefits they gained, and these benefits are gossip, fashion tips and the latest scoop on upcoming events. Others said they enjoyed free goods and services from competitions. The main reason why brands are increasingly turning to social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, is to engage with consumers and be more involved with them. Therefore, Vorvoreanu (2009) suggests that, to keep customers interested and avoid customers from leaving the brand pages, it is a wise idea that brands do not use marketing strategies that are too obvious to audiences because there may be a decline in customer involvement to brands.

iii) Self-perceived Behaviour

Some students expressed that brands they ‘followed’ on social networks shape the way they live their lives. They added that when they viewed people’s pages on social media platforms, the way they showed off their lives compelled these students to change their own lifestyles such as health, fitness, and fashion and make-up tips. Therefore, social media is a representation of reality; it portrays a ‘false reality’ to its audience, participant 6 mentioned. Thus, a self-perceived behaviour can be determined by the way people come to understand changes in attitude, based on their behaviour in a particular situation. Therefore, participant 2 said that

“Instagram is somehow selling a lifestyle to us. Like a certain way we have to live, places we have to go to, restaurants we have to eat at.”

With that been said, there are brands that shape consumer behaviour. In other words, in support of this, one participant said she closely ‘followed’ a specific Instagram model, a person that models clothes and underwear on Instagram to win more ‘followers’, because of the way she dresses and lives her life. She mentioned that,

“I am a hair and make-up person therefore, I often check for updates on hair products from the person I ‘follow’. Majority of times, brands from her page have links to follow tagged on pictures of different types of weaves, Peruvian, Indian or Brazilian. And also some brands teach people how to shape eye brows, a tutorial I learned from the model.”

Africanism is seen as a feature of either language or culture which characterises one’s African culture. Participant 2 argued that

“my attitude towards engaging with a brand such as Khosi Nkosi with his African Print designs is due to the fact that he embraces Africanism, like when you wear that kind of style you should feel good to be an African woman. He shapes women to feel beautiful, like “Queens”.”

By that she meant that the amount times she wore the designs made her feel good to be an African woman. And the way the brand designer promoted his work on his brand pages made one feel as though they are important; she said he makes you feel like a “Queen”.

Within a self-perceived behaviour, the idea of consumers being loyal to brands was exposed. Brand loyalty is determined by the way people use the same products for a long period of time. During the discussion, participants mentioned that they have been loyal to brands. Furthermore, it is argued that when a customer is satisfied with the quality of a brand, it may lead to loyalty (Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997). Therefore, participants stated that what constituted loyalty to brands was the good service they received from brands. For example, participant 1 said

“Woolworths sells the best foods, and their clothes are of best quality. Their food is always fresh. What I love about it is that they are loyal to us too. They give reward cards, and with that you manage to buy clothes and food without paying cash.”

Other students mentioned that their loyalty was constituted by product quality and comfort in clothes. And participant 3 said

“I have been so loyal to Sissy Boy for years. Their clothes are so comfortable, especially their jeans, they are stretchy and last you for years. You pay a high price for the quality of the material in clothing.”

This is to show that a satisfied customer will remain supportive of brands because of good service and quality food. Moreover, participant 2 highlighted that for brands such as Clicks keep customers

“... through competitions, loyalty points, and club cards which enable one to get products at a half price. They also distribute monthly magazines or send emails about promotions to their loyal customers.”

Therefore, she stays using their services because of the benefits she gained on a monthly basis.

2. Discussion from Focus Group 2

i) *Brand Engagement*

There are 9 participants in this focus group and all ‘followed’ and shared brands on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter with their friends. However, the majority of participants said they prefer using other social networks over Facebook because they are more convenient to use and they also give brands better exposure. And for that reason, participant 4 said

“when companies advertise their brands on Instagram, it is easier to discover new adverts posted on their brand pages about new products and through that option, brands end up gaining a lot of “followers” on their pages.”

However, other students said they ‘followed’ brands on Facebook only, and the reasons for using other platforms was because other people persuaded and influenced them to join, therefore according to participant 6

“my sister asked me to join so that I can “Like” her pictures. I had an influence from my sister. But truly, I am less involved with interacting with brands on Instagram than I am on Facebook.”

Furthermore, it was interesting how majority of participants in this group said they mostly shared entertainment brands because they enjoy jokes, competitions (competing on Candy Crusher, on Facebook, for the highest score) and lastly, event brands. Also, these participants said the major motivation behind sharing brands with friends on Facebook was because of good communication and brand experience. And according to participant 9

“with Facebook, I can easily tag and share a brand of my interest with my friends. And it allows you to post a set of pictures, maybe about special offers and big sales from a brand, then you tag names of your friends to share.”

On the other hand, participant 1 mentioned that what motivated her to share brands with her friends was because she wanted them to know about

“The latest gossip, fashion – like Bonang Matheba’s new dress designs or her latest endorsements.”

a) Social Interaction

Participants from this group argued that they prefer to use electric word-of-mouth over traditional word-of-mouth to acquire and spread information. However, participant 1 stated that for reliability purposes

“traditional word-of-mouth is more reliable than electronic word-of-mouth because if you personally come to me and say: “this lipstick works wonders!”. Then I’ll trust you because I see it on you.”

It is important for people to engage with brands online and offline, especially when information about brands needs to be spread to other people. Some participants believe that these two forms of communication have different functions but they are both in a way reliable. For example, participant 2 mentioned that

*“I feel like with regards to spreading information, obviously if I want to spread something to a wide range of audience now, it will reach to them instantly through electronic word-of-mouth. However, I agree with **Participant 1** in a sense of gaining information, traditional word-of-mouth works better. What makes it better is that it allows you to see the person’s facial expressions.”*

Additionally, it was discovered that participants preferred to use Facebook for spreading eWOM about brands therefore, eWOM assists in reaching large audience as it contains references to advertisements since the web enables for information, pictures and links sharing (Svensson, 2011).

ii) Popular Brands

Brands on social media need to strategically expose themselves through advertisements to attract audience. There are particular brands that participants preferred to engage with on Facebook and therefore, the following are the most ‘followed’ brands: product brands such as Supersport for updates on soccer games, logs and results, and Coca Cola for competition purposes; personal brands such as Khosi Nkosi for African print fashion tips, and Bonang Matheba also fashion and makeup tips; lastly, place brands such as islands for vacation purposes, hence participant 9 said

“Islands mostly because those are places I would like to travel to for vacation one day. There is something about the ocean water around Islands, it is clear-blue.”

Additionally, features which drew them to communicate with brands are the benefits such as celebrity gossip, and fashion tips. For example, participant 1 said

“I ‘follow’ personal brands such as Bonang Matheba. I ‘follow’ this particular celebrity because I like her fashion tips, she fascinates me so much. She is my number one idol, future image of me.”

In agreement to the above statement, participant 8 mentioned that she also ‘followed’ Bonang Matheba together with her endorsements such as Revlon. For example, when their favourite “idol” is trending, students were able to view their Facebook page to see what types of brands these people were using for their endorsements. Additionally, what I discovered during this discussion was brand influence because this participant was influenced by her “idol” to buy products from Revlon. She said,

“Revlon has a range of lipsticks in different colours, when I saw the ad I actually went out to go buy myself one of the lipsticks, they smell so good and they last. When Bonang Matheba had it on, she made it look so classy and elegant. I also bought the makeup set from Revlon (foundation, concealer, eyeliner and mascara), all of them.”

Some participants said they features that drew them to interact with brands was their professionalism. What they mean by this was that if a person complains on a brand page, the social media management are quick to respond. For example, participant 7 said she has encountered problems before with a brand’s product

“I have complained about a brand’s bad service as they delivered a meal with ingredients short. Then I complained on their page. Then they sent me a friendly inbox and asked that we go back and get our reimbursement, and we received free a meal.”

Most brands have a team that manages and attends to these kinds of issues, so to keep customers satisfied. It was interesting to find that there were participants that ‘unfollowed’ brands or moved to other brands because of bad service or brands’ disorganisation of information on their pages.

iii) Self-perceived Behaviour

Arguably people’s actions are socially influenced and therefore, participants said that brands may have an impact on people’s lifestyles because of the way people portray themselves and their lives on social media, they feel the pressure to change the way they have to live their lives. Fashion trends lately rapidly change according to the audience’s interests. For example, participant 9 mentioned that she ‘followed’ and shared Khosi Nkosi’s African print designs because of the way the print brings out her natural self when she has it on, being a true African.

Furthermore, brand loyalty is an element of a self-perceived behaviour. In other words, people’s attitude towards a brand may change by the influence of others. During the discussion, participants mentioned that they are loyal to specific brands because they grew up using them. Therefore, family habits and perceptions have such a way of influencing one’s consumer buying behaviour because people are still stuck to the buying habits and consumption patterns that they had known and been influenced by their families for years (Mwambusi, 2015). Therefore, participant 3 adds on to

“The brands I am still loyal to this very day are those that I grew up using at home like a toothpaste brand, Colgate, I still use the same as that from home.”

It was interesting to discover that people can passionately express their loyalty to brands such as McDonald's service, online and offline. Participant 1 mentioned that McDonald's gives one of the best services, in other words, it does not matter where you are, you will still receive the same services.

"I am very loyal to McDonald's. Like, everyone knows I would die for it. And believe me, McDonald's has the best service in the world. And I feel like they are always on top of their game regarding improvements, like new burger meals etc."

Furthermore, there are participants who mentioned that they maintain their loyalty on brands, and this is a form of customer retention (Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997).

3. Discussion from Focus Group 3

i) Brand Engagement

This group had 4 participants who 'followed' and shared brands with their friends on social media platforms however, one participant said he only 'followed' brands but does not share with his friends because he only wants to gain information on any latest fashion trends over spreading it to his friends. So, participant 2 said she preferred using Facebook to 'follow' brands because

"Facebook is easier to use and it is straightforward."

However, some participants mentioned that with a huge exposure of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, brands have realised that people are heavy users of these platforms and therefore, that allowed them to shift from traditional way of advertising, such as television commercials,

newspapers, and billboards, to advertising their brands on social networks. With this option, it will allow them to reach a large number of customers at once and enable them to interact with these customers. For example, participant 3 mentioned that

“Unlike with television commercials, for their brands to be exposed, people have to sit and watch TV and at the time, marketers have to see if it is peak or off-peak and then slot their adverts there. Therefore, the disadvantage of this is that they are unable to communicate with their customers then. And sometimes at that moment, you might find that the message reached to a small number of people.”

So, through market research, companies have realised that social media is more efficient than commercial advertising.

Furthermore, the major motivation behind students sharing brands is the way some social networks are set up. For instance, participant 3 also said that

“Twitter is set up in such a way that limits my wording. Facebook and Instagram’s set up is very flexible and easy to use.”

To add on this statement, participant 1 agreed with participant 3 and said

“Facebook has so much to explore. I mean companies can recommend their products to you; you can watch comedy videos and tag your friends to those videos. Even with the brands that you do not ‘follow’, you can easily go to their pages to just see and explore what they have.”

What was interesting to discover was that one participant said he was motivated to share brands that add innovation and development such as technology, architecture, and beautiful cities. Participant 3, for example said

“seeing such will inspire us to be better than who we are. Like I feel like the brand that shows this perfectly is Top Billing. It brings all sorts of entertainment stuff on the show plus those that innovate and portray development in South Africa.”

a) Social Interaction

All participants said electronic word-of-mouth is more effective than traditional word-of-mouth when engaging with brands on social media because one gets to see people’s opinions on the brands. However, some participants said even though eWOM may be liable than WOM, whatever opinion, negative or positive, people may have on the brands that they maintain their loyalty to, will never change their attitude towards that particular brand. Thus, participant 4 stated that

“For me, if I have to engage with a brand is mainly based on what I like and prefer. Whether a person, through word-of-mouth, or other customers online, through electronic word-of-mouth, would tell me to ‘follow’ or ‘like’ a brand page, I will decide whether that goes with my “taste” or not.”

Participants believe that the feature of eWOM allows marketers to see what customers have to say about a brand because consumer-review on social media has an emphasis on broader product experience (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014).

ii) Popular Brands

Participants said features that drew them to ‘follow’ brands were for a good living. They mentioned that they ‘followed’ brands that build their lives in some form of way, for instance, Herbal Life because it promotes healthy living. It provides ways to look after one’s health, for example, how to lose weight in given time period. Others said they mostly ‘followed’ product brands such as Mercedes Benz because they are fans of the brand, and participant 3, for example, said he ‘followed’ this brand

“because of its class, comfort and how expensive it is.”

While others said they mostly ‘followed’ Media brands, especially entertainment brands, such as Netflix to watch the latest movies online. While some participants preferred to ‘follow’ retail brands such as Mr Price for the latest clothing trends. Furthermore, participant 3 mentioned that he ‘followed’ product brands from Bidvest and features that drew him to ‘follow’ them were that

“They auction cars and I feel like what they post add motivation that one day I will own one of those cars. Like they send an invite for you to join their auction and in their posts, they have a schedule of the dates and times of the event.”

4.2.2.2. Conclusion:

Regarding brand engagement, participants all said they engage with brands on social media, mainly Facebook. It was then uncovered during the sessions that, most participants preferred to use other social media channels such as Twitter and Instagram but amongst them, Facebook remains the source of brand engagement as it is easier to use. Thus, what motivated them to all share with their friends was the latest trends on fashion tips, competitions and new technology

inventions. Additionally, in order spread information about brands, all participants mentioned that electronic word-of-mouth is more efficient than traditional word-of-mouth. However, some participants argued that traditional word-of-mouth is beneficial in acquiring information from their friends. In contrast, some participants from focus group one stated that what motivated them to use other platforms over Facebook is how easy they can access information on brand pages.

Moreover, most participants mentioned that features that drew them to engage with popular brands were mainly for fashion tips, celebrity gossip, professionalism and healthy living. They added that these impacted their lives in some form of way, in other words, how to change their lives. However, some participants said the reason they shifted to other platforms to engage with popular brands was because some pages were not appealing as they provided vague information about the brands.

Lastly, from the analysis, it was discovered that brands had major impact on participants from focus group 1 and 2's self-perceived behaviour. In other words, they found these brands influential to their lifestyles, for example how they have to live their lives. And also being loyal to brands has affected their lifestyles too. However, that was not the case with participants from focus group 3 as they did not mention how brands have an impact on their self-perceived behaviour but rather they only 'followed' them for awareness and innovation purposes.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The focus of the research was to discover how University of Kwa-Zulu Natal's Pietermaritzburg students use Facebook to engage with brands. The objectives aimed to answer are: which brands do students engage with most on Facebook; what features draw students to interact with brands on Facebook; how networks like Facebook, help facilitate sharing; and what types of brands do students choose to share with their network? And why?

Moreover, themes that were discussed in Chapter 4 were interaction on social media, brand engagement, and self-perceived behaviour and brand loyalty. Theorists such as Bushelow (2012) says that for people to engage on social media channels such as Facebook, as a popular social media platform, inspires individuals to share information about themselves, their interests, and exchange thoughts and ideas with others thus, marketers can use it as a branding tool. Further, marketers can also use Facebook for brand awareness. In my focus groups participants said they engage with brands on Facebook and use this platform to share their interests about their favorite brands. This supports Daugherty's (2014) argument that the emergence of social media has created a two-way communication system, allowing consumers to connect, create, produce, and share media content online. However, during my discussion, students from focus group one stated that they preferred using other platforms over Facebook to 'follow' and engage with brands. Furthermore, Kaplan & Haenlein (2010: 67) reinforces his findings that social media allows companies to engage in "timely and direct contact with consumers at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency and that could be reached

through more conventional communication tools”. Furthermore, it was through the sessions that this above statement was proven and therefore, it will be fully unpacked in my results.

5.2 Findings

From the discussions what emerged from both my questionnaires and focus groups was that students did confirmed that ‘followed’ and shared brands on social media.

- *Quantitative Results*

As stated in chapter 4 under quantitative results, there were unanticipated results found. It was discovered that all participants from all three Colleges engaged with brands on social media. They stated that they used Facebook as their primary platform to ‘follow’ and share brands with their friends. However, some participants highlighted that they preferred to use Facebook in combination with other social media channels such as Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. An evaluation was done on each College, and what was interesting to find was that from the College of Humanities, postgraduate students tended to use Facebook only however, those undergraduate students who listed Facebook as their primary social media platform were slightly older than those undergraduates who preferred platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. Therefore, this suggests that marketers should integrate other social networks to their marketing mix because it was evident that younger users are less likely to engage with Facebook only. In contrast, students from Law, Management and IT and Agriculture, Science and Engineering departments highlighted that they preferred to use Instagram in combination with Facebook over other platforms for visual purposes.

Furthermore, majority of students across the three Colleges engaged with these two types of brands, media and product brands. And therefore, they stated that features that drew them to ‘follow’ and share these popular brands with their friends was for exclusive savings, promotions and relevant competitions. And they mentioned that for brands that offer entertainment, they ‘followed’ them for leisure purposes. What was interesting to discover was that Candy Crusher was popular amongst students on Facebook and about 36% of students highlighted that they played it to compete with their friends for the highest score.

Moreover, what I have also discovered was that during quantitative data collection process, those that did not answer certain questions, was evident during my qualitative data collection because through close observation, some participants were probed into answering because they showed no interest in certain questions.

- Qualitative Results

5.2.1 Brand Engagement Behaviours

As mentioned in Chapter 4 that brand engagement is the main focus of the study because it deals with how students use social media channels to engage with their favourite brands. By observing students from different Colleges on how they engaged with brands on Facebook, it was discovered that all participants across all three Colleges ‘followed’ and shared brands and Facebook was used as the primary platform for ‘following’ and sharing brands of their interests with their friends. However, some students have shifted to using other social networks, because they stated that those other platforms such as Instagram, are more visual and the picture quality is better than on Facebook due to the filter option provided on those platforms. One participant from focus group one said that the fascination with Instagram is that brands of their interest

often ‘follow’ users back, and at times, share pictures from their page. This is something that has never happened to each individual on Facebook before. They also highlighted that using Instagram over Facebook is easier and provides more information about a brand, although they feel that Instagram provides ‘false reality’, in other words, people on Instagram can have a major influence on lifestyle change. What they mean by this was that, with the latest trends online, people change their fashion look, and how they need to apply makeup to fit with rest of society. One participant provided an example that due to the brands she ‘follows’ she now shapes her eyebrows just like how her favourite brands shape them, and she also buys expensive weaves and makeup that her brands promote. Moreover, she also added that through what gets displayed on this platform, one is not being their own natural self, based on what is portrayed by others. In contrary, my other focus groups members highlighted that they preferred to engage with brands on Facebook because it provided them with factual issues and spreads information about their favourite brands thus, allows them to share that acquired information with their friends. This process of brand engagement is built through the motivation behind brands combining communication, satisfaction, experience and brand awareness (Vukasović, 2013). Additionally, what motivated participants to engage with brands on Facebook was for brand awareness strategies companies use such as product sales and competitions, to attract audience as they acquire more than enough information about a brand. While others highlighted that the motivation behind engaging with brands was for good communication and brand experience. This supports Bushelow’s (2012) argument that Facebook is able to inspire students to share their brand interests with their friends.

Brand engagement advocates for brand exposure, in other words, companies have moved from traditional forms of advertising, such as television, radio, magazines and printed newspapers, to new forms of advertising because as highlighted by one of the participants in focus group

three that marketers have shifted from traditional forms of advertising to integrating social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. This is due to the fact that social media is ideal for brand exposure and reaching a wide range of customers at once. One other participant during the discussions mentioned that there is a shift in the use of Facebook to Instagram because younger users have shifted from using Facebook to ‘follow’ brands to promoting them on Instagram to their friends. Brands are more popular on Instagram than they are on Facebook due to the way they are promoted. This statement is supported by findings which show that consumers are turning away from traditional sources of advertising (Vollmer & Precourt, 2008) to new forms of advertising, on social media which has become an ideal source of information regarding products and services consumption, and thus, “frequently used as a basis for purchase decision making” (Harrison-Walker 2001: 60).

5.2.2 Facebook for Social Interaction

Social interaction is at the heart of social networks such as Facebook, as it enables people to stay connected with one another (Castells, 2004). There are two forms of communication that students mentioned to have an effect on how they engaged with brands, and those are traditional word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth. During my focus group discussions, I found out that students preferred to use traditional WOM to gain information because the information is perceived to be trustworthy, while electronic WOM is used to spread information as information will reach a larger group of people at once. However, a participant during one of my discussions, indicated that both these forms are effective as eWOM is more useful for spreading information about a brand to a wide range of audience, and traditional word-of-mouth is also needed, as it allows for one to directly hear the message and to also clearly see facial expressions. However, there was one student that argued that she found WOM more effective than eWOM due to the trustworthiness of their social circle. This means that they

trust the personal relationship that they have with someone who they know offline regarding provided information however, most of them trust the relationship with individuals that they have never met online. This supports Richins and Root-Shaffer (1988) that WOM plays an important role in purchase decision making.

It became apparent when participants mentioned that they found eWOM more effective when it came to fashion and popular trends. This affects the way they perceive trendsetters, as brands can start and spread a new fashion style to assist in its popularity (Saez-Trumper et al., 2012). Furthermore, the way in which ‘followers’ on social media look up to brands shapes and influences people’s consumer buying and communication behaviour (Svensson, 2011).

5.2.3 Self-perceived Behaviour and Brand Loyalty

Through the discussion of brand engagement, the issue of how brands have influenced students’ self-perceived behaviour emerged. Research indicates that through brand image, consumers’ perception and feeling about a brand can be shaped, and that has a major influence on consumer behaviour (Zhang, 2015). To determine what interests ‘followers’ had on brands, marketers’ “main purpose of their marketing activities is to influence consumers’ perception and attitude toward a brand, establish the brand image in consumers’ mind, and stimulate consumers’ actual purchasing behaviour of the brand” (Zhang, 2015: 58). Interestingly, during the discussions, participants mentioned that they feel like what other people post on social networks, such as Facebook and/ or Instagram somehow affects their lifestyle change. For instance, one of the participants from focus group one said that what affects her attitude to engaging with brands was based on the fact that one of her favourite brands embraces Africanism, in other words, Khosi Nkosi’s African print designs makes one feel like an African

beauty because Africanism is seen as a feature of either language or culture which characterises one's African culture. In agreement with participant 2, a participant from focus group two mentioned that her attitude toward engaging with a popular brand of her choice was that it represents being an African based on the fact that the brand brings out an element of being true to one's culture, a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, because brand loyalty is an element of a self-perceived behaviour, participants mentioned that their attitudes toward a brand may change by the influence of others such as family members. For example, being loyal to brands one grew up using. Therefore, according to Mwambusi (2015), family habits and perceptions have such a way of influencing one's consumer buying behaviour because people are still stuck to the buying habits and consumption patterns that they had known from their families for years. Also, what was evident during the discussions was that what constituted brand loyalty was receiving good services from brands. And one participant passionately expressed that she is loyal to a brand's service, online and offline, because their service is the same anywhere one goes.

The majority of students said they engaged with media brands from their home countries to stay updated with what was happening while they were away, and others preferred to 'follow' product brands for features such as exclusive savings, promotions and relevant competitions. Students stated that their attitudes were constituted by fashion and trends. It was interesting to discover that fashion and trends help stimulate online activity (interaction) on Facebook, hence one participant said he 'followed' trendsetters; in other words, people that start, spread a new fashion style or help it become popular (Saez-Trumper et al., 2012) because of their fashion

style. Hence Svensson (2011) argues that the way in which ‘followers’ on social media look up to brands shape and influence people’s consumer buying and communication behaviour.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter provided an analytical discussion of research findings together with the objectives of the study. Therefore, the discussion made detailed reference to the literature review. Further, the final chapter will conclude the study by outlining the summery of the study and thus, pointing out the study’s limitations and recommendations.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

6.1. Introduction

This chapter determines the conclusion of my findings and thus, highlights research limitations and recommendations for further research. Therefore, the study made an in-depth knowledge on how students engage with brands on Facebook. Additionally, what this research aimed to find was: *which brands do students engage with most on Facebook; what features draw students to interact with brands on Facebook; how networks like Facebook, help facilitate sharing; and what types of brands do students choose to share with their network? And why?*

6.2. Conclusion of the Study

To answer my key research questions, results discovered compared to the established norms regarding brand engagement found in the literature review. Firstly, I discovered that students across all three Colleges ‘followed’ and shared brands with their friends in some form of social media channel, however, the main platform they all used was Facebook. This type of platform helped facilitate sharing because it has showed its major influence on “various aspects of consumer behaviour including awareness, information acquisition, opinions, attitudes, purchase behaviour” through engaging people with brands on brand pages (Mangold & Faulds 2009: 358). Therefore, through exposure, students found it important to always share relevant information about brands of their interests with their friends so they could get opinions for purchase purposes. In addition, the major importance of Facebook is that these students as consumers of particular brands can communicate with companies and other consumers at the

same time and thus, companies can use the reviews to make changes on their brands. In contrary, I have found that for marketers to find a gap in the market, they have to integrate other platforms into their marketing mix to maintain relationships with targeted audiences, because more and more younger users are shifting to using other social networks over Facebook. This is because they are active and heavier users of these platforms and therefore, prefer advanced features that come with the sites. Through these offers, as marketing strategies, it shapes consumers' perception, attitude and feel about a brand and that can have a major influence on consumer behaviour (Zhang, 2015).

Moreover, students mostly 'followed' and shared product brands, retail brands and media brands; therefore, the majority of students highlighted that they mostly 'followed' media brands that offered entertainment, and features that drew them to engage with them was for leisure purposes, competitions and fun however, what was interesting to discover was that postgraduates from both surveys and focus groups mentioned that they 'followed' entertainment brands for exclusive savings and good offers. This is due to life responsibilities such as budgeting, one participant mentioned. On the other hand, other students stated that what drew them to engaging with retail brands was for fashion and makeup tips and sales, whereas for product brands, they engaged with these brands was for special savings, promotions and relevant competitions. They decided to 'follow' these brands because they had benefits to offer. Additionally, they share these popular brands with their friends for awareness purposes and that they also want their friends to benefit from offers.

Moreover, through close observation, I noticed that there was a confusion on what branding is. In other words, participants confused branding with self-promotion because one participant

from focus group 2 indicated that he used LinkedIn to interact with brands to acquire information for academic purposes. LinkedIn is a platform used to self-promotion, job search and recruitments, and interacting with professionals for advice purposes and job acquisition but not for branding. Branding happens when brands find their significant presence in the market so that they can attract consumers, through advertising strategies, for brand loyalty therefore, the appropriate platforms for branding are Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

6.2.1. Limitations and Recommendations

This was a very short study as I could only look at a small number of students from Pietermaritzburg campus. Therefore, it will be useful for future research to expand to a larger group of students from other campuses from South Africa to see if there will be similarities or differences students' perceived behaviour when engaging with brands on social media and thus, evaluate it.

Furthermore, a sample of 107 students was selected to partake in the survey, however, two questionnaires were not returned. The aim was to equally distribute 35 surveys to participants, but participants from College of Agriculture, Science and Engineering came to be dominant with more participants. Additionally, I conducted three focus groups however, due to the 2016 protests my data collection procedure was affected and therefore, my third focus group was cut down to four participants. In other researches, it will be useful to make sure that the numbers are the same. Further, during my sessions, some people did tend to dominate the conversation and thus, I had to be involved a little more to lighten it so that other people felt they were not left out.

Another limitation was that, if focus groups are to be used in future, a relook on how companies define brands and how participants see brands should be explored and thus, a clearer explanation on the difference between branding and self-promotion should be done.

Lastly, there are some areas in this study, such as the cause of a self-perceived behaviour when engaging with brands on Facebook, that need more exploration and further research due to lack of information from participants, especially those from focus group 3 as they did not engage much on the theory. The reason for this is because it is a different study which needs further research.

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APPENDIX:

Appendix 1:



School of Arts
Private Bag X01, Scottsville Pietermaritzburg 3209
Phone: 033 260 5542/ 061 9607610
Email: thabziduma@yahoo.com

Agreement to Participate in a Research Project

I am gathering information for my Masters project at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I would be grateful if you would agree to be involved in the research process.

My project is entitled: Brand engagement on Facebook: An analysis of UKZN Pietermaritzburg Students habits. I plan to collect information from the UKZN students, in order to understand how these students use Facebook to interact with brands. I hope that the results of my research will help to do this.

I would like you to be involved in taking part in answering my questionnaires and partaking in my focus group/ interviewing. I would like to request permission to use the information garnered from these interviews in my project. I will not force you to engage in anything that you are uncomfortable with and I offer you the option of withdrawing from the project at any time with a full promise of confidentiality regarding whatever information you have contributed. Every effort will be made to ensure your confidentiality is protected. Once the research is complete, all notes and transcripts will be destroyed. I will not force you to answer any questions against your will.

If you have further questions regarding this project, you may contact me or my supervisor. Our address and phone numbers are listed at the top of this letter and our email addresses are as follows: 'Mathabo Duma, 12 St. Patricks Road, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg 3201; Ms Sandra Pitcher pitcher@ukzn.ac.za.

Thank you for your time.

'Mathabo Duma

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

I (name of participant) understand the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project, and consent to participate. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, if I so wish.

Sign: _____ Date: _____

QUESTIONNAIRE

Engaging with brands on Facebook

Dear Participant,

I would like you to participate in this survey. Please note that your information will not be used maliciously, and that it is anonymous. If you would not like to participate in this survey you are welcome to opt out, as it is not compulsory.

Thank you.

Please could you fill in the answer in the provided spaces.

1. What is your nationality?

2. How old are you?

3. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

i) Matric/ A-Level/ Other (*please specify*)

ii) Undergraduate

iii) Postgraduate

4. Field of study?

5. What is your gender:

a) Male

b) Female

6. Do you FOLLOW brands on social networks?

- a) Yes
- b) No

(If YES, please continue with the survey. If NO, please return it to me)

7. Which social network(s) do you use most to FOLLOW brands?

- a) Twitter
- b) Facebook
- c) LinkedIn
- d) Flickr
- e) Other (Please specify)

8. Once you have followed the brands, do you SHARE them with your friends on social networks?

- a) Yes
- b) No

9. If YES, why do you SHARE those brands with your friends?

10. If no, why do you NOT SHARE these brands with your friends?

11. Which social network(s) do you use most to SHARE brands with your friends?

- a) Twitter
 - b) Facebook
 - c) LinkedIn
 - d) Flickr
 - e) Other (Please specify)
-
-

12. What type of brand(s) do you follow on Facebook?

- a) Product brands (*e.g. Coca Cola, Nike, Sony, BMW, Mercedes*)
- b) Service brands (*e.g. Airlines, Banks*)
- c) Retail brands (*e.g. Supermarkets, restaurants, clothing stores*)
- d) Personal brands (*e.g. Celebrities*)
- e) Place brands (*e.g. Destinations, cities*)
- f) Media brands (*e.g. Newspapers, Movies, SABC News, eNCA*)

13. Have you ever followed a brand for special savings or exclusive offers?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

14. Have you ever followed a brand on Facebook which offered entertainment such as games, contests, and/ or events experiences?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If YES, please specify which brands:

15. Do you like knowing the latest news about brands?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

16. Do you follow brands because you feel you are a fan of the product?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

17. Do you follow these brands to see what are the latest trends?

- a) Yes
- b) No

If YES, how often do you go online and check the new trends?

18. Do you follow brands to show others what you like?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

19. Do you interact with a brand because you want them to hear you or your problems?

- ☐ Yes

- ☐ No

20. Do you follow/ like a brand because your friends do?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

21. Do you want to recommend or connect your friends with your favourite brand?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

22. Do you follow brands because you want to engage and connect with other followers/ customers?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

23. Have you ever disconnected/ unfollowed a brand?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

23.1. If *YES*, why do you stop following a brand? (*Tick as many as you want*)

- ☐ The content become repetitive or boring over time
- ☐ I only liked a page to get discounts/ deals and now it is no longer useful
- ☐ I 'like' too many brands and my wall was too crowded
- ☐ I was no longer interested in the brand or company

- Information was not published too frequently
- OTHER reasons

Thank you for participating in my survey and if you are interested in taking part in my focus group, please leave your **DETAILS** below:

Name: _____

Email Address: _____

OR

Contact Number: _____

Appendix 2:

Questions for the Focus Group:

Introduction of my Research Question:

How do University of Kwa-Zulu Natal's students use Facebook to interact with brands?

Icebreakers:

1. Would you ever buy your lecturer a tub of ice cream for marks?
2. What do you find most fascinating about Instagram than any other social networks?

Lead in to main questions:

3. Do you 'follow' brands on social networks? Why?
4. Which social network(s) do you think is ideal for 'following' and sharing your brands of interest with your friends?
 - 4.1. Why are (*the abovementioned social networks*) the most popular used social networks for following and sharing brands with your friends?
5. Which POPULAR brands do you follow and then share with your friends on Facebook? [*Please name a few brands of your interest*]
 - 5.1. Explain what features draw you to 'follow', engage or interact with those brand(s) you have mentioned.
 - 5.2. What do you mostly want them to know about what you have shared with them?
 - 5.3. Why do/ don't your friends find those brands interesting?

BREAK

6. With brands that offer entertainment on Facebook, what do you think you will get out of following them? Why?
7. Which form of communication do you find more effective to use in order to spread/ gain new information about trends on Facebook (*WOM or eWOM*)? Why?
8. How is your attitude towards engaging/ interacting with a brand ever affected by the use of e/WOM?
9. How ideal are the Facebook brand pages for checking for the latest updates on trends?
10. [*For those that go online every hour/ two/ night before bed; daily; weekly*] which social networking platforms do you use to check for the latest updates such as trends: *new brand products, news updates, information on new holiday destinations, discounts on brand products and many more;*
 - 10.1. Do you ever notice new posts within that small space of time on Facebook?
What are the posts mostly about?
11. Have you ever complained about a brand on a Facebook brand page and therefore got respond or not?
 - 11.1. What kind of problems have you encountered with that particular brand?
12. Have you ever been loyal to brands? What constituted that?

.....**END OF SESSION!!!**.....